

Jail Bird by Lalyeth

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Summary:

Billy is sentenced to 10 years in prison, separating him from Steve and the outside world and forcing him into a world he is not ready for. Meanwhile, Steve is left to deal with the empty hole left by Billy's absence.

1. The Beginning is the End

Author's Note:

So, this is the first chapter of a multi-chapter Harringrove fic I have been planning for several weeks. Hope you all like it and I'd love to hear everyone's feedback/thoughts etc. =]

March 10th, 1990

“William Hargrove, would you please stand.”

The courtroom was tense as Billy rose to face the judge, poker-faced and shackled.

“Mr Hargrove, you have been charged and tried by a jury of your peers for the attempted murder of your father, Mr Neil Hargrove,” the judge read from her notes, eyes fixed on the paper before her.

Billy stood on the witness stand, stoic as ever as the judge read out the details of his crime. Steve watched from the court seats, his stomach knotting and twisting as he looked on. Over the past few weeks, he'd wished to god Billy had just allowed himself to express *some* semblance of emotion during the trial. Steve didn't need to speak to the jury to know they were a surly, righteous bunch of assholes. He'd seen the raised eyebrows, the disapproving headshakes and audible tuts they'd offered as the evidence had been handed out. The prosecution had been good. Too good. Since the trial had commenced, Neil Hargrove had been elevated from abusive asshole to benevolent, well-meaning father. Billy had been described as an ‘unruly, ungrateful, problem child’ with ‘violent tendencies his father had always lived in fear of’. The first day of the trial, Steve had been asked to leave the courtroom after standing up in his seat and telling Neil Hargrove *exactly* what he thought of his testimony.

It had all come down to this moment.

“Mr Thompson,” the judge addressed the head of the jury. “Have you reached a verdict?”

“We have, your honour,” the juror replied. The whole courtroom froze in anticipation. “We find the defendant, Mr William Hargrove, guilty on the count of attempted murder.”

Steve felt as if he was going to be sick, and as he looked over to the stand he noticed the slightest downward flicker at the corner of Billy’s mouth, his eyes becoming glassy, a haunted expression creeping across his face as the court bailiffs rose, placing their hands around his boyfriend’s arms and proceeding to haul him from the stand. And something in Steve snapped then.

“This is bullshit!” Steve spat, jumping out of his seat. “This is fucking *bullshit* and you know it!”

“Sir, I recommend you settle down immediately!” the judge demanded.

But Steve was inconsolable.

“Billy! Billy, look at me!” he called across the courtroom. “I’m gonna get you out, OK? I’m not gonna let them do this to you!”

Billy turned in Steve’s direction as he was lugged through the courtroom, the pair of them only several feet apart.

“Don’t worry about me, Harrington,” Billy managed to tell him as their eyes met, the faintest, hollow smile on his face. “I’m not as soft as you.”

And then he was gone, man-handled out the backdoors of the courtroom, where an awaiting flurry of local reporters and flashing cameras awaited, ready to hungrily latch onto the spectacle.

“Steve, *Steve*, are you listening to me?”

Steve felt a hand wrap around his arm, zoning back into reality as he felt Nancy’s grip on his arm. He forced himself to sit back down, staring back at Nancy’s concerned expression, her big eyes terrified, welling up with concern.

“Steve, look, it’s gonna be OK, buddy. We’re both here for you.”

Steve looked across at the sound of another voice, realising Jonathan had moved closer up to Nancy, was staring at him with the exact same expression. And in that moment, Steve found himself thinking selfishly. He felt bitter, resentful. Wishing, for a brief, shameful moment, that he could have stayed with Nancy. Wishing she and him had never parted ways, that she’d never run into the arms of his now good friend Jonathan Byers, wishing the two had never married.

Perhaps that would have saved him from this heart-wrenching pain, the intangibility of loving Billy Hargrove.

December 20th, 1986

Steve drew his eyes to the clock radio. It was 9.20pm now and he’d been sat in the parking lot of Hawkins General for over an hour now. It was the Love Hour on Hawkins FM, and Steve couldn’t help but feel somewhat mocked by the sound of Huey Lewis’ ‘Stuck With You’ playing over his current internal turmoil. He’d been back from college just two days now, and already he felt the urge to flee Hawkins, Billy in tow. He hadn’t seen what happened back at the Hargrove household last night, but Max had told him plenty. Neil had beaten Billy black and blue, and Max had taken it upon herself to bundle him into the Camaro and drive her step-brother to the hospital by herself. As he gazed across the parking lot at Billy’s car, now diagonally parked across two parking zones, it occurred to Steve that Billy must have taught Max to drive at some point.

Billy limped out of the infirmary doors just after 9.30pm, and Steve got out immediately to help him to the car. One side of Billy’s face was scattered with dark purple bruising, stitching over his left eyebrow, and as they got into the car, Steve noticed Billy’s arm wrapped around his stomach. He felt a lump in his throat as he strapped his boyfriend in, before strapping himself in and starting the car.

An hour later and they were back at home, Steve laying Billy down on his bed. Billy took a cigarette out of his bloodstained denim

jacket, placing it to his lips and fumbling for a lighter. He winced as he sat up, once again wrapping his hands around his middle and leaning back.

Steve took the cigarette from Billy's mouth and laid down beside him, pulling him closer until they were next to each other.

"Where does it hurt?"

"Where does it hurt?" Billy laughed. "Fucking everywhere, Harrington."

Steve pushed Billy's hand away from his middle and pulled up Billy's shirt to examine the extent of his injuries. The entire top half of his body was littered with purple bruising, specifically at the top of his chest and abdomen. Steve ran his hands down Billy's chest, fingernails clinking with his necklace.

"They let you keep this on?" Steve asked, palming the pendant between two fingers.

"I didn't let them take it off," Billy smirked, looking into Steve's big eyes, dazed expression across his face.

Steve laughed, running his hand up and down Billy's bruised stomach gently, an attempt to soothe and comfort him.

"Does that hurt?" he asked.

Billy sighed, ignored the pain from the pressure of Steve's touch and allowed himself to indulge in the luxury of somebody genuinely caring for him. "No. It's nice."

Steve smiled then, planting a kiss on Billy's forehead and holding him close with his other hand.

"Goddamnit, Billy. This isn't right."

"You getting all soft on me now, Harrington?" Billy grinned, flicking his tongue out over the split area of his lips.

"Shut up, you know what I mean. You need to get out of that place.

We need to get out of here. Together.”

“Come on, Steve, you know that’s never gonna happen,” Billy muttered. “I haven’t got the money to leave Hawkins. And my old man would kill me if I even tried. Besides, *you’ve* already got outta this place. You telling me you ain’t the big man on campus at Princeton by now?”

Steve felt an unwelcome wrenching sensation in his chest then.

“Look, Billy, I love you. And I know you don’t wanna say it, but we both know you feel the same way. I care about you, OK? I’m not gonna leave you here.”

And that’s when he noticed the first of the tears trickling down Billy’s face.

“Whatever, Harrington,” Billy whispered. “Now shut the fuck up and let me sleep, OK?”

Steve held his boyfriend close, cuddling him and taking in his scent, listening to his heart beating, watching the rhythmic up and down of his battered chest as he coiled one of Billy’s soft, golden curls around his fingertips. Steve kissed Billy’s bust up cheek and the pair fell asleep in each other’s arms shortly after.

That night, Steve dreamt of the two of them living far, far away from Hawkins. They were together in California, far away from the abuse of Billy’s father, and the insanity of Hawkins. And for once, in the past few months, Steve had experienced a fleeting sense of hope.

2. Sweet Like Chocolate

Summary for the Chapter:

So, here's chapter 2. Thanks so much for everyone's feedback so far, it's been very much appreciated :D Hope you all enjoy. I will be including more flashbacks in later chapters, so if there's anything you're particularly interested in seeing, please let me know and I will see if I can explore it as the story goes on.

April 15th, 1990

“So, am I allowed to wish you a happy birthday?”

A small mountain of vending machine candy sat between Billy and Steve on the visiting room table. Billy's gaze drew down to the table as he picked up one of the various candy bars and examined it.

“Is my birthday present diabetes?” he asked.

“I baked you a cake, you know,” Steve told him. “But they wouldn't let me bring it in to you. So I guess you'll have to make do with Hawkins Penitentiary's finest selection of vending machine goods.”

Billy laughed, although his gaze didn't quite meet Steve's. He unwrapped one of the candy bars and shoved half of it into his mouth in one bite.

“Shut up, Harrington,” he muttered through chewing. “Shit, this is good. You know, it's amazing how much you take food that tastes of anything for granted.”

“Or food in general,” Steve frowned. “Billy, you look like a fucking rake. Are you sure you're doing OK?” This was the first time he'd been able to see Billy since his trial, and already this place seemed to be taking its toll on him. He was thinner, paler, dark purple bags hanging underneath his eyes. Even Billy's hair seemed to have lost its lustre, his usually glossy curls hanging limply over his forehead in

dry, matted waves. He had, however, maintained some semblance of his appearance in the outside world, the sleeves of his bright orange overalls rolled up past his elbows and the top four buttons of his shirt undone, revealing his undershirt and necklace.

At Steve's question, Billy shrugged, discarding the now empty candy wrapper and reaching for another. "I don't know. Besides the whole ten years in prison thing? I guess so. I mean, if you ignore the complete lack of freedom, privacy and dignity. And you know, the psycho cellmate who keeps telling me the reason he's in here is that he *ate* some people. Sure. It's...you know...it's fine."

Steve watched the smile flickering across Billy's face in bewilderment.

"Billy..."

Billy looked up, still smirking, still chewing. But there was nothing he could do to disguise that haunted look in his eyes. "Yeah?"

And Steve found himself unable to put it into words. His heart broke to see his boyfriend like this, hear him reel off the sort of stuff that would have most people breaking down into tears with such aloofness that it was unfathomable.

"Shit. You gonna cry, Harrington?" Billy taunted.

"Stop it, Billy," Steve shook his head. "Just, stop, OK? I don't get to see you for over a month and when I finally do, you can't even be straight with me?"

Billy snorted. "Straight? I think we both know –"

"Billy, *please*..." Steve felt his words catch in his throat.

And something in that seemed to snap Billy out of his façade, if only for a moment. His expression softened, smirk vanishing from his face. He ran his hands through his hair and closed his eyes, sighing.

"Look, Steve. I'm fine. At least, I will be anyway," he said, reaching over the table and placing a hand over Steve's. "I've got you, haven't I?"

Billy's hand was so warm and familiar it sent a shock of happiness through Steve's entire body, followed by a longing sadness as Billy very quickly snatched his hand back away as a fellow inmate passed by.

"It's just...none of this is fair," Steve whispered. "It's your birthday. We should be able to spend it together."

"Well you're here now, ain't ya?" Billy grinned. "I mean, don't get me wrong, I'd have rather woken up to your dumbass face than the site of my crazy fuckin' cellmate writing a list of names on the wall, but hey, you know. I'll take what I can get."

Billy laughed, Steve didn't.

"Your cellmate, he didn't really...you know..."

"What? Eat people?" Billy snorted. "Like shit did he. I asked around. Armed robbery, shot himself in the leg and fell into a chip stand. There's a guy a couple of cells down who was in on it with him."

Steve bit his lip, tried to repress the laughter.

"Goddamnit, Billy. I'm gonna get you out of here."

Billy's smile faded then, his eyes travelling back to the ground as he shook his head.

"Well, good luck with that, Harrington."

A loud buzzing alarm suddenly flooded the room, and Billy looked up to see the rest of the prisoners rising from their seats.

"Alright, ladies, visiting time's over! Come on, say your goodbyes!" one of the guards called from nearby the entrance back into the prison.

"Christ, I hate that guy," Billy muttered. "Guess that's my cue, Princess."

Steve checked his watch, felt an awful sinking feeling as he saw the time.

“No, that can’t be all the time we have. It’s...it’s only been...”

“Oh, come on, I’m sure you can make it a couple weeks without seeing my face,” Billy smirked, standing and pulling Steve into a hug. “Just be glad you get to shower without twenty other dudes staring at you and get to eat actual human food in the meantime.”

Steve gripped hold of Billy’s shirt, feeling a lump rising in his throat. He moved in to kiss him, but Billy jerked away fast.

“Billy...”

“Hargrove! You heard the drill! Now move your ass!” The guard hollered across the room, tapping the steel bars of the prison entrance.

“Nothing personal, Princess, you understand, right?” Billy winked, grabbing a fistful of confectionary from the table and shoving into the pocket of his overalls. “See ya in a couple weeks.”

Billy carried on through the prison entrance without looking back, tried to fight back the tears as he entered the communal area. *Shit. Why hadn’t he just let Harrington kiss him? What harm would it have really done? Besides, it was common knowledge most of the long-termers in here turned to dick eventually, right? Not that it was really the same...*

“Hey, Hargrove, how you doing?”

Billy snapped out of his train of thought as he felt a hand connect with his shoulder, finding himself abruptly shoved into a nearby concrete wall and pinned against it. Billy swallowed, attempted to remain composed as he came face to face with Stanford.

“I’m doing fine, Stanford. How about you?” Billy asked. “Did you do something with your hair? It looks good on you.”

Stanford’s glare bore into Billy, his face contorted, teeth bared as he let out a humourless, growling laugh. At 6’4”, the heavily tattooed and completely bald Kit Stanford was perhaps not the best inmate in this place to get on the wrong side of, but there was something in his shitty treatment of the new inmates that hit a nerve in Billy. He reminded him of Neil.

"You're a funny one, ain't ya, Hargrove?" Stanford hissed. "Didn't know the prison had given us our own personal stand-up comedian. You got anymore jokes for me?"

Billy remained silent. It was a warning, not a question.

"That's what I thought," Stanford snarled. "What's this you got here then?" he asked, plunging his hand into the pocket of Billy's overalls and pulling out the handful of confectionary. "Whose dick did you suck to get hold of this, pretty boy?"

Don't say it, Billy, don't say it...

"Your mom's," Billy muttered, barely louder than a whisper, his heart hammering in his chest because *why couldn't he just keep his damn mouth shut.*

Stanford's eyes glowed, his grip tightening on Billy as he pushed him further back into the wall.

"What...was that, Hargrove?" he asked, his hand clamping down on Billy's shoulder.

"I said..." Billy breathed. "Your m—"

Stanford's fist connected with Billy's jaw before he'd even finished the sentence, knocking his head back against the wall and flooding his head with searing pain. He could taste blood, and after the second blow, everything went black.

3. Beat on the Brat

Notes for the Chapter:

Warning: this chapter contains reasonably graphic descriptions of domestic violence. Avoid if you feel it will upset you.

It had taken Billy until he was twenty-one before he'd finally had the guts to tell Neil he was moving out. The minute high school had finished, Billy had hoped all his troubles would be over. He'd move out, move far away with Harrington to a place far less backward. They'd make a home for themselves together in a town less infested with monsters, both literal and figurative. He soon realised that had been nothing more than a fantasy. The day after school was out, Neil Hargrove had dragged his son out of bed and hurled a pile of oil stained overalls at him.

"Moving out? No. You're gonna start paying me back for all the years you've lived here for free," Neil had told him. "You're gonna be working at the garage with me, and putting that money back into *my* house, you understand? You can move out once you've repaid me."

Billy hadn't even dared to ask how much that would be, or *when* that might be. By this point, he was too afraid of the man to question anything, too afraid to even *attempt* to flee. Besides, he'd reasoned with himself, perhaps it was best he stayed. Whilst he was there, at least he could protect Max from Neil's wrath. Neil may not have hurt her so far, but where would he direct his anger if his go-to punching bag of a son wasn't readily available anymore?

Breaking the news to Steve had been tough, and so had working a six day week at Hargrove Motors week in, week out. The violence didn't stop, and every week, Neil took almost half his pay cheque in 'repayments'.

Three years went by, until finally, Billy had gathered the nerve to move out. He'd appeased Neil with the promise he'd stay on at the garage, and move just a few streets away. Neil had made sure Billy would keep his promise by driving his Camaro to the tip and having

it destroyed the day before Billy moved out.

The years went by, and Billy carried on existing as best he could. Harrington came back from college and moved in, and for a while, he felt a sense of peace. He had his own place, he had a small amount of money to himself that allowed him to pay his rent, and he had Steve. But Neil still oversaw every aspect of his life. The day Billy turned twenty-two, Neil waited until closing time at the garage, and then beat him black and blue. He knew about Steve, and he couldn't accept the idea of his son being gay. *I didn't raise no fuckin' faggot.*

It was mid 1989 before Billy realised enough was enough. Max was due to leave for college in two weeks, and finally, he felt as if it was OK to up and leave Hawkins for good. Steve had been elevated, ecstatic even, wouldn't shut the fuck up about getting a tan in the Cali sun, spending time at the beach, etcetera, etcetera...

They were due to leave the morning of August 29th.

August 28th, 1989

"Billy? Billy is that you?"

Steve rose, groggy with sleep as he picked up the phone at the side of his bed.

"Max?"

"Steve? Is Billy with you?"

Steve held the receiver away from his ear, ran a hand over his face, rubbed the sleep from his eyes and looked over to the other side of the bed.

"Yeah, Max. He's with me. What's going on?"

"Can you...can you just put Billy on, Steve?" Max asked, her voice breaking. She was crying, and suddenly Steve snapped out of his dream state, realising the fear present in her voice.

“Max, what’s happened?” Steve asked.

There was a long, drawn out pause, the phone line crackling.

“Max?”

“Yeah?”

She was crying hard, choking on her words. And Steve *knew*. He knew exactly what had happened. The minute Billy had told Neil he was leaving, all of Neil’s anger had been redirected. Steve realised now, with depressing clarity, exactly why Billy had refused to leave Hawkins for so many years.

“We’re coming to get you now, Max. Just hold on, and stay in your room, OK?” Steve instructed.

“OK,” Max sniffed. “Please, be quick.”

“That asshole! That fuckin’ asshole! I’d been scared of this shit happening for years, but I never thought he’d actually do it! He hit her? He actually *hit* her?!”

Billy was boiling over with rage as Steve’s car sped along the darkened country lanes towards the Hargrove household.

“Just calm down, Billy, OK? We’re gonna go get her, everything’s gonna be fine, trust me.” Something in Steve knew this wasn’t true. He’d felt a resistance to waking Billy up and telling him what had happened. As much as he loved him, Steve knew Billy was still as volatile and damaged as he’d always been, and he’d known all along, really, how protective he really felt over Max.

The car screeched to a halt outside the Hargrove household several minutes later, and Billy had jumped out the car before Steve had even had the chance to turn the engine off.

Billy was a force of pure rage as he slammed the door open, making a beeline for the staircase.

“Max?” he called up the stairs. “Max are you up there?”

There was creaking on the staircase, and Billy caught sight of a shock of red hair, Max peering over the staircase, tears in her eyes, her left eye swollen and bloody.

“Billy?”

“Yeah, Max, it’s me,” Billy sighed, basking in the brief sense of relief that his sister was still conscious, *still alive*. “Come on, get your stuff, you’re coming with us.”

And then Max’s eyes widened. “Billy! Look out!”

But Billy didn’t have the chance to act, feeling a blunt hit to the back of his head, feeling the warm blood trickling down the back of his neck as he was knocked to the floor. He heard Max’s screaming, and then, the sound of his father’s boots against the hardwood floor. Billy managed to roll on to his back, and now, he was face to face with Neil. There was a menacing glare in his father’s eyes now as he brandished a baseball bat in both hands.

“What the fuck are you doing here, faggot?” Neil spat, looking up to the staircase. “What, she call you, did she? You suddenly the big strong saviour? I thought you hated that skank’s daughter anyway!”

Billy felt his whole body shaking with fright, but he pushed past it, thought of Max. He pulled himself up off the floor and stood to face Neil.

“Where the fuck is Susan?” he asked.

“She’s gone. Probably off with her new side piece. Guess she’d only been hanging around for the money, wanted to make sure her little slut of a daughter had the money to get into college before leaving!” Neil spat, looking back up to the staircase. “Don’t think for a minute I don’t know the both of you were in on it, Maxine!”

Neil took a step closer to the stairs, where he was met with Billy’s

hand, pushing him back.

“Don’t you *dare* get in my way, boy,” Neil hissed.

And almost everything in Billy was telling him to run back to the car, back to Steve, and drive away to the safety of California. But he couldn’t. Not without Max.

“Leave her alone,” Billy muttered, blocking Neil’s way, their faces only inches apart now.

“I’ll warn you, *one* last time. Get, the fuck, outta my way, you goddamn fuckin’ faggot.”

Billy laughed. “That ain’t gonna happen, old man.”

He’d barely finished his sentence before Neil’s fist smacked him head on in the nose. Billy fell down in the stairway, temporarily dazed. He watched helplessly as Neil stepped over him, bat still in hand.

“Where are you, you little whore?!!” Neil bellowed as he reached the upstairs. “You ring my asshole son to come rescue you, huh? You want everyone to know what happened?!”

And Billy was now vaguely aware of another voice, the sound of the front door bursting back open, footsteps rapidly approaching.

“Billy, oh my god! What did he do? Where’s Max?” Billy looked up and realised Steve was now leaning over him, helping him to his feet.

“Jesus, Billy, what did he hit you with? The blood... there’s so much...so much blood...” Steve stammered, practically in tears, his eyes darting all over his body. And Billy felt awful. How could he have dragged this guy, this pure as fuck, lovely guy who he cared about so much, into this horrible reality – the mess that was his life?

“Stay here, Steve,” he muttered. “I swear to god, don’t try and be a fuckin’ hero right now, OK? This guy is dangerous.”

“Billy, I’ve fought supernatural demon dogs! You think I can’t—“

“Trust me, this guy is worse,” Billy cut him off. “Just let me deal with

this.”

He took a step up the stairs, felt Steve’s trembling hand clasp around his.

“Billy, please...I’ve called Hopper on the carphone, he’ll be here any minute...”

The air was suddenly penetrated by the sound of Max’s screaming, and suddenly, it was as if everything was in slow motion autopilot. Billy’s hand left Steve’s, and now he was ascending the staircase, heading straight for Max’s bedroom. He kicked open the door to her bedroom, spotted Neil towering over his sister as she cowered in the corner by her bed, watched as Neil raised the bat over his head, ready to swing.

Billy grabbed the bat, twisted it out of Neil’s hand, and swung back.

Max screamed as she witnessed the first hit, as Billy’s face was splattered with Neil’s blood. And the rest was all lost in rage. Billy couldn’t stop. All the years of abuse, all the years of repression, violence, mockery, and bullying. It was all coming out. And he just, couldn’t, stop.

At some point, he was vaguely aware of the police arriving, of Hopper dragging him away from Max’s room. Max was crying, so was Steve, and Billy was hauled outside, handcuffs on, back of the cop car. *Why’d you do it Billy? Why’d you do it?* That’s what the police kept asking.

It had all been a blur from that point on, and all Billy could wonder, was why he hadn’t rescued Max sooner, why he hadn’t *left* sooner. Hindsight was a funny thing.

Too late, Billy, too late.

4. You Keep Me Hanging On

Summary for the Chapter:

Lots of Steve feels in this chapter. Also thanks to @CaptainA for introducing me to Don't Lose My Number, it reminds me of Billy and Steve so much I have referenced the song within this chapter =D Also, in case the dates are kind of hard to keep up with, this is a year's skip forward in time from the last time we saw Steve visiting Billy in prison.

May 29th, 1991

“So, *what?* You’re just not gonna tell me anything now? Every time I come here, you’re covered in bruises, and you can’t tell me shit about how they got there?”

Billy shook his head and laughed. Another enraging crack of his knuckles and Steve had had enough. He stood up, chair scraping across the visiting room floor and setting Billy’s teeth on edge as he did so.

“You leaving early, Princess?” Billy asked, eyebrows raised, bust lip peeling open with his smile. “But you only just got here.”

But there was no sincerity in his voice. Steve could tell. The Billy he once knew had been drifting further and further away from him with every month he spent in this shithole. Whatever vague sense of love or warmth Billy had once conveyed during Steve’s visits was almost entirely gone. And now he was left staring back at this snarky, broken person resembling his boyfriend, half beaten to a pulp and simmering with pent-up rage. Billy was hurting as much emotionally as physically, but now, he was no longer willing to open up to Steve. He was pushing him away.

“You know, maybe I should stop visiting you altogether. I mean, why the hell should I drive up here every week, huh? To find you beaten

almost as bad as that...that monster beat you all those years? Do you have any idea how that makes me feel? Why won't you just let me help you, Billy?" Steve tried, one last time.

He noticed the faint glaze of tears in Billy's eyes, as every other part of his boyfriend's body language fought desperately against giving away even the slightest inkling of vulnerability. He was rocking back in his chair now, licking his lips.

"Why do you care how it happens?" The smile on Billy's face was cruel now, his expression hardened. "Don't you like me like this, Harrington? Isn't this what gets you hot?"

He slammed down all four chair legs abruptly and got up, standing face to face with Steve now.

Steve found himself momentarily stunned.

"Billy, why are you doing this?" he whispered. "Why are you trying to push me away? You know, if there's anyone in this world who wants to protect you it's me..."

Billy ignored him. "Isn't *this* the sort of thing you're into, huh?" he waved a hand over his face, taking a step closer to Steve. "Poor, pathetic Billy? You like kissing my wounds, don't you, Harrington? You like to see me broken so you can make me *feel better*..."

And the mimicking tone of Billy's voice breaks Steve's heart. He can barely find the words to speak, to stop Billy from continuing.

"Does it make you hard? Do you get off on it? Rescuing me like you do, like you have done for so many years? I mean, there's nothing like being the hero, now is there, *King Steve*? Always best to have a good, reliable, white trash project to work on, isn't it? Bit like your parents, really, aren't we? What was it your mommy did before she started fucking the boss? Your daddy, the big man around town--"

"That's enough, Billy!" Steve hissed, as low as possible so as to not draw the attention of the guards. "You're hurt, OK. I get it. And you're angry. You don't like to feel weak, no one does, OK? But please, please just... just don't push me away OK?" he pleaded,

taking a step closer to Billy, reaching out for his hand. "I love you, and you love me--"

"Hey! Back off!" Billy announced, presumably for the benefit of the entire room as he swiped his hand away and took a step back from Steve. "I told you to stop visiting me here, OK, faggot? I ain't interested!"

Steve stared back at him wide eyed, felt his heart break in two.

"Are you fucking kidding me right now, Billy? I'm a *faggot* now, am I? You picked up some new vocabulary whilst you been here?" He looked into Billy's eyes, and all he could see was fear and hate. "So this is why they've been hurting you, huh? Because they know about us. They know that you're..."

"They don't *know* anything, Steve. There's nothing left for them to know," Billy muttered, seconds before the guards reached him, hauled him off back into the cells, leaving Steve stood alone in the visiting room. All around him, amused prisoners jeered. Maybe they'd been jeering at the pair of them for the past year, and only now, without Billy's reassurance, he could truly see this.

Suddenly, he felt hollow.

It had been several hours since Steve had left Hawkins Penitentiary. The sun had set, and dusk had begun to creep across Hawkins. Even now, this time of night usually filled Steve with dread. After all, he tried to reason with himself, you don't exactly spend several years fighting off an army of demons from another dimension and come out the other side entirely mentally unscathed. Right now, however, he was barely able to register the looming darkness. Right now, he was more concerned with the broken cassette player in his car.

"Stupid fucking thing!" Steve snapped, slamming one of his fists down against the cassette player, other hand on the wheel. The drive to Nancy and Jonathan's house was at least an hour out of town, and

from the minute Steve had got into the car to start his journey, he'd been greeted with the sound of Phil Collin's 'Don't Lose My Number', stuck on repeat. The tape was jammed. And after the tenth play, he was just about ready to tear the entire stereo out of his car and hurl it out the passenger window.

Finally, he arrived outside Nancy and Jonathan's. Or, according to the mail box outside their enviably perfect, white picket fenced home – *The Byers*. Something was already telling Steve he was not going to enjoy the party tonight.

'Party' didn't really mean to Steve what it meant to the newlyweds these days. Binge drinking, loud music and making out by the edge of the pool had made way for polite conversation, expensive wine sipped in moderation, and a buffet table. Nancy and Jonathan had grown up fast, moved away and moved up in the world quickly, their high school and college partying days already a fading memory. This hadn't really bothered Steve at first, but now, with Billy locked up, he felt alone. What had he been doing the past few years whilst everyone had been growing around him and making lives for themselves? As he approached Nancy and Jonathan's front door and rang the buzzer, he realised he'd spent the past five years of his life coasting on by on a 'one day, maybe' fantasy with Billy. Did Billy always know it was never really going to happen for them?

Steve felt bitter and angry as he considered this. He'd been cheated out of a future. And for what? Having the love of his life turn around and call him a faggot before being dragged off back to a cell, the place he'd call home for the next nine goddamn years?

"Steve! You're early!" Steve snapped out of his toxic train of thought to see Nancy stood in her doorway, beaming. "Come on, come inside! There's a few people here already!"

Steve forced a smile and a hello, and followed Nancy through into the lounge. He looked around, spotted a couple vaguely familiar faces from high school, but no one he really felt the urge to speak to. The rest of the small crowd must have been work, maybe old college friends. Either way, he felt pretty lost already.

"Steve, how are you man?" Steve turned to see Jonathan enter the

lounge through the sliding doors leading to the backyard. If you could even call it a backyard. It was more like a goddamn field.

“Hey, Jon,” Steve greeted him, feeling a familiar, fleeting sense of irritation. He could never quite understand it, but it had always been there. Even when Billy had been on the outside, it was there. A small, residual amount of jealousy that Jonathan had ‘got the girl’. It was ridiculous, he’d told himself, high school was ancient history.

So why did it still hurt just a little every time he saw them together?

“So what you been doing with your time lately, Steve? Nancy tells me you got a lot of free time since you sold your share in your parent’s business,” Jonathan continued, handing him a beer. And Steve was becoming increasingly aware he was not in the mood for small talk. He was not in the mood to be here at all, in fact.

“Yeah,” Steve nodded, took the beer and wasted no time in taking an extended swig from it. “I guess I’ve just been...you know...figuring out what to do. You know, now that my first set of plans have kinda gone to shit.”

“He’s been finding it hard without Billy this past year, haven’t you Steve?” Nancy clocked the blunt tone in his voice immediately and intervened. “You saw him today, didn’t you? How was that?”

This was the precise point Steve stopped giving a shit about putting up a front for the evening. He laughed, took another long swig of his beer and sighed.

“How was it, Nance? Shit, the guy’s locked up for the best part of a decade. How do you think it was?”

The pair looked at him in awkward anticipation, expecting another hard-to-answer cynical remark.

“I’m sorry,” Steve shook his head, his eyes dragging down to the floor. “Ignore me. It’s just hard, you know, seeing him like that. I promise I won’t go on about him all night.”

He felt Nancy’s hand reach up to squeeze his shoulder then, and he felt awful.

“Steve, don’t be sorry, it’s OK,” Nancy told him softly. “We’re here for you, you know that right? We’re always here for you.”

“Yeah,” Steve nodded. “Yeah, of course I do Nance.”

Shit. What was he even doing here right now?

The night went on, and as more and more unfamiliar faces poured in, Nancy and Jonathan eventually became lost in a sea of people Steve felt a compulsion to avoid. This wasn’t like him. He wasn’t an antisocial person. At least, he hadn’t been, before all of this.

After a while, he found himself outside, alone with nothing but a fully stocked table of expensive alcohol and a view of their enormous backyard. He drank. There was no other function he felt capable of in this environment right now. He told himself, maybe it’d help him loosen up, forget about Billy, about today, the past fourteen months alone. Maybe if he got drunk enough, he’d be able to join in, make some new friends, stop telling himself there was no point in any other human connection compared to the one person he couldn’t have.

It was pitch black outside before Steve re-entered the house, pushing past people and staggering up the stairs to the bathroom. He must have been puking for about five minutes straight.

He gargled some of the mouthwash from the medicine cabinet, washed his hands, and made his way back onto the upstairs landing, catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror as he made his way towards the stairs. Fuck. He was a complete mess.

Time to go home.

Steve had been so drunk he didn’t even hear Nancy call his name from the other end of the landing the first few times.

“Steve? Are you OK? Are you sick?” Nancy’s voice finally registered to him as she caught up with him by the bannisters.

“I’m going home, Nance,” Steve slurred.

"In that condition? No, no you're not. What are you gonna do, *drive home* like this?"

She reached out to touch his arm, guide him away from the staircase and towards the spare room. "Here, let me help you..."

"I'm fine," Steve muttered.

"No, you're not fine, Steve. You're drunk," Nancy informed him, finally managing to pull him away from the stairs and lead him across the landing.

The next thing Steve knew he was being laid out on top of the bed covers, Nancy placing a washing basin by the side of the bed, telling him to use it if he felt sick again.

Steve blinked, hauling himself up as Nancy came to sit by his side.

"It's going to be alright, Steve," she told him. "I know you can't see it right now, but everything's going to work out for you. I know you."

She leaned over, kissed his forehead. Steve caught the familiar scent of her perfume, and felt a deep, aching nostalgia.

And what the hell was he saying to her now?

"We were happy once, weren't we Nance?" he was slurring. "Me and you? We were happy. Maybe...you know, maybe I was wrong....maybe it should have been you..."

Nancy was on the other side of the room, hand on the light. The room was spinning.

"Steve, you're drunk. Get some sleep, OK?"

"No, Nance, hear me out...Billy, he's an asshole. He doesn't care about me."

"I'm going now..."

"He thinks I'm a...I'm a..."

The bedroom light went out, door closed. He could hear Nancy's footsteps becoming lighter and lighter as she made her way across the landing, towards the stairs to re-join the party.

And now Steve was alone in the spinning darkness.

“...he thinks I'm a goddamn faggot...”

5. Monster Mash

October 31st, 1991

Outside in the prison yard, the air was so cold it hurt against Billy's skin. Billy folded his arms tight to his chest, wished to god the one-size-fits-all 'coat' he'd been provided with had some sort of insulation in it. He shivered, watching his breath rattle out in front of him. He sat hunched over on the bench by the edge of the basketball court. It was the furthest away he could sit from Stanford and his cronies, but that didn't usually stop them.

It had been a couple weeks now since Stanford's gang had tried anything, and for the first time in months, his bruises had just about healed. Perhaps they were making good money this month. Billy had noticed a pattern with the beatings. If people weren't buying enough of Stanford's array of drugs and contraband items, he'd find a way to relieve his anger. Billy wasn't his only human stress-ball, but he seemed to be a favourite.

Billy glanced over towards the other side of the yard, evaluating the number of cronies currently circling Stanford. A shiver ran down his spine and his stomach twisted in knots. Approaching Stanford was the last thing he wanted to do right now. But if not now, when? He couldn't take another beatdown, another ambush in his cell, he simply couldn't take any more pain than he was already in. Billy had hoped freezing Harrington out would have eased the pain and misery of being in this shithole, but it hadn't. If only he could erase whatever hope he had left, it would be easier to accept his fate – that's what he'd told himself. Seeing Steve every week and not being able to go home with him had been so hard that, in the end, it'd just been too much. In fact, six months ago, Billy couldn't have imagined that anything would ever hurt him *more* than that feeling. It was only when Steve's letters stopped that he realised how wrong he was.

Billy stood up, felt another bite of the air against his face like glass. He took a step forward, then another, arms still folded against the cold. *Shit*. They were already looking in his direction. *No turning back now, Hargrove. Straighten up. Don't fuckin' piss your pants on the way there, for god's sake.*

And it wasn't just Stanford and his crew who were watching. As he drew closer and closer towards his enemies' table, Billy was becoming acutely aware of the entire yard's eyes upon him. It was as if everyone had stopped to watch the spectacle. The stress ball willingly offering itself up to be mangled. Movie night wasn't until Saturday and this was the best entertainment they were going to get on a Tuesday afternoon.

I wish she was here.

Billy very almost stopped in his tracks at that sudden intrusive thought. And suddenly all he could hear was Neil's voice. *What? What was that, Billy? You want your mommy? Well she ain't here, is she? So stop crying like some sorta pussy!*

He was nearly at Stanford's table now, and the circle of lackeys had parted like some sort of tattooed veil, revealing Stanford and the smuggest, *most infuriating fucking expression* Billy had ever seen plastered across his goddamn face.

"What do you want, shitweasel?" Stanford asked, cracking his knuckles. His followers laughed on cue, but Billy forced himself not to bite. Reacting to this prick was how he got into this whole mess in the first place.

"I wanna talk to you," Billy managed to say without stammering. "Alone."

Stanford snorted. "Aww, you hear that everyone? Hargrove misses me! Guess the little queer wants a private session with me. You getting lonely since your lover-boy ditched you?" More laughter, and Billy's fists tensed for the briefest second. He snapped out of it, kept his cool.

After a while Stanford motioned for his crowd to stop. He leaned forward in anticipation. "Whatever you gotta say, sweetheart, you can say it to me *and* my friends."

Billy unfolded his arms, took a step closer. He was jittering with fear, but fortunately, the whole yard was jittering from the cold. He'd never been so grateful for the cold weather before in his life.

Billy swallowed his pride and anger, and began.

“Look, Stanford, I wanted to...I wanted to apologise. I pissed you off, I get that. And I’m...I’m sorry. Alright? I am. But the thing is, that’s not the only reason I wanted to speak to you...”

Stanford’s eyebrows were raised, but he remained silent, glaring at Billy with those batshit crazy eyes, unblinking, waiting for more.

“...the thing is, I guess I was just being an asshole because I wanted to impress you. I suppose I thought that you’d let me into your circle or some shit, I don’t fucking know. What can I say, I’m an idiot.”

The silence that followed could have been cut with a knife, and Billy was already bracing himself for a crack in the face. *He knows you’re lying, you’re completely see-through...*

“Alright, Hargrove,” Stanford grinned finally, standing. He walked over to him, and Billy’s heart skipped several, terrifying beats as he felt Stanford’s hands slam down onto his shoulders and swerve him around to face the rest of the yard. “You wanna be in with us? Prove it. See that little piss-ant over there by the court? Dark hair, glasses, yeah, that’s the one. He ain’t been paying up. Why don’t you go show him what happens when people don’t pay up, Hargrove, *really make it count*. Let’s get these assholes scared. It’s Halloween after all, right?!”

Stanford was laughing maniacally at his own joke, and by now, Billy’s heart was racing so fast he could hear it in his ears, his head becoming so overloaded it felt as if it might swell up and explode. But he kept his breathing as steady as possible.

“OK. I’ll do it.”

October 31st, 1988

“And just who the fuck are you supposed to be?”

Billy sat up on the sofa, cigarette hanging from his mouth, eyebrows knitted in confusion as he stared back at Steve.

“Are you kidding me?” Steve was incredulous. He motioned to his t-shirt, which he had painstakingly applied the lettering ‘GROOVY’ with fake blood.

Billy blinked, exhaled a plume of smoke. “Yeah? You’re like...some guy with blood on his face and a lame ass shirt? I don’t get it.”

“I’m Ash! Ash Williams? The Evil Dead?”

Billy raised his eyebrows. “What?”

“You haven’t seen it? Are you kidding me?”

“No?” Billy said, stubbing his cigarette out. “I’m not into all that horror crap, you knew that already. I’m surprised you are. Don’t you think this town has enough of that shit to make a movie of its own? No, screw that -you could make a *whole goddamn show* based on it.”

“Billy, you said you’d indulge me,” Steve smirked, walked over to the couch and dropped down beside Billy.

“OK, OK. I guess you do look kinda hot with all that fake blood splattered all over you,” Billy sighed. “Reminds me of the night you ...uh...you know, fought off those weird-ass dog things...”

Steve’s smirk was widening now. “And why did I have to do that again, Billy?”

Billy rolled his eyes. “Shut up, Harrington.”

“*Billy*, why was that?”

“*Jesus, fine*. Because I’m an idiot, got drunk and fell down an interdimensional asshole into hell itself,” Billy recited. “...and then, you found me, fought all the monsters that were trying to eat me off with your stupid nail-bat, etcetera, etcetera, I’m eternally grateful for you saving my crappy life and I love you, etcetera. Happy now?”

“Yep.”

They were both smiling now.

“You know what, sometimes I think you don’t—“ Steve began, finding himself cut off by Billy’s lips pressing against his, hands running through his hair as he pushed him back against the sofa and climbed on top of him. That weirdly sensual smell of smoke and cologne. Billy’s necklace dangling against Steve’s chest, cold and familiar. Steve forgot his point, and as Billy slowly moved down from his neck, to his waist, and below, the two of them forgot everything.

Later that night, Steve finally convinced Billy to watch his ‘dumb-ass Evil Living Dead movie’, Billy getting way too into the tacky gory violence, suggesting it all could have been avoided if someone had brought a nail-bat along with them to the remote cabin in the woods, and telling Steve approximately once every five minutes how stupid the movie was, eyes never once leaving the screen. He fell asleep before the end, but Steve didn’t wake him.

6. Living In A Box

November 13th, 1991

You've really fucked it now, Hargrove.

Billy scratched another mark into the cell wall with his fingernail. There were fourteen marks in total now, one for each day he'd spent inside this tiny shithole cell. He felt as if he was slowly going insane. The first night, after the incident, he'd expected it to last a few days. He'd been relieved, at first. At least being thrown into solitary meant he wouldn't have to deal with the usual prison yard politics -- pleasing the right people, avoiding the wrong sort. Two days went by, and still, Billy had still been somewhat thankful to be away from it all, if not somewhat claustrophobic. Maybe a little *unpleasantly* claustrophobic.

By the tenth night, he'd no longer been able to sleep.

Four days later, and Billy was now a complete and utter mess. After tallying his marks, he returned to slowly rocking back and forth on the bed, knees pushed up against his chest and arms wrapped tightly around them. He'd been muttering to himself for over a week now, desperately trying to placate his wildly anxious, burnt-out brain, stop it from getting the better of him.

'It's alright. It's alright. They won't leave me here. They won't leave me here. They can't. They won't. It's alright.'

But no amount of frantic self-reassurance was enough to truly convince himself. After all, it wasn't like he had any visitors these days. No one was going to chase up Hawkins Penitentiary for his lack of visits or phone calls, were they?

Sleep deprivation had very quickly racked Billy's nerves and sent his psyche into haywire. The hallucinations began on day twelve. It'd started as a vague, disembodied scratching, and at first Billy had tried his hardest to convince himself it had been coming from one of the cells next to his. But really, he knew very well that both cells to his left and right were empty. Over the following days, the scratching

had gradually increased in volume and evolved into intermittent wailing, whispering, screaming.

The night of day thirteen, he'd heard Harrington call his name, as clear and crisp as if he'd been inside the cell with him. This morning, he'd heard the voice of his dead mother. '*Stay strong, kid.*' It had been the very last thing she'd ever say to him before she walked out of the front door for the very last time. And now, it was taunting him. Over and over, on a cruel, tormenting loop. *Stay strong, kid. Stay strong.*

November 20th, 1991

"You did well, Hargrove. Haven't had a no-pay since you taught old four eyes a lesson." Stanford lit up a cigarette and handed it to Billy. "Good, right? Kinda stale compared to last month's batch, but you gotta take what you can get in here, haven't you?"

Billy nodded, taking a drag, thankful for the first smoke he'd had in weeks.

"Sorry about the whole isolation mess, kid," Stanford continued. "But you know, I needed to make sure you were loyal. Shows a real commitment, you going through with that, Hargrove. I mean, for a faggot, you can really hurl a punch. Next time, though, let's make sure no one who counts sees."

Billy looked up then. "Next time?"

Stanford laughed. "You do want to be in with us, don't you? Shit, Hargrove, you know what we do in this place, right? I need to make sure my products keep selling. The fuckin' roaches in here need to know there's a penalty for not paying, you understand that, surely?"

Billy swallowed, took another drag of the stale cigarette. "Course. Yeah."

Stanford was distracted now, his eyes travelling across the running track, fixing upon one of the newbies as he completed a lap.

“Might have a job for you soon, actually. Something tells me that shitmunch over there isn’t used to paying his debts on time.”

Billy forced a laugh, tried to block out the climbing anxiety. Stanford knew nothing of his time in solitary, the sleepless nights, the hallucinations. And he wasn’t about to let him know just how unsuited he was to this new job of enforcer/debt collector. Billy needed the protection, and he wasn’t about to go back to fending for himself in this godforsaken hellhole.

“New product,” Stanford interrupted his train of thought, nudging him in the side and holding out a baggie in front of him.

“What is it?” Billy asked.

“The purest high you’ll ever experience,” Stanford grinned. “Or so I’m told. Don’t fuck with the stuff, personally. Gotta keep the psyche clean and sharp, you know?”

Billy nodded. “Yeah, I get that.”

“You wanna try it? Always best for business if the dealer knows their product, after all...”

Billy paused, staring back at the packet, eyes wide. “I...uh...no. No, I’m...I’m OK.”

Stanford shrugged. “You’re missing out, kid. Jesus, most people in this place would sell their goddamn grandmother to get hold of this stuff for free.”

A sudden sound of approaching footsteps, and the two of them quickly extinguished their cigarettes, Stanford shoving the baggie back into his pocket and standing.

“Meet me later by the benches,” he told Billy, slapping him on the back and making a hasty exit.

Billy stayed put, looked out across at the track as the footsteps drew

nearer, finally stopping just before him. He clocked the guard's boots out of the corner of his eye.

"Hargrove, you've got a meeting."

Billy's mind was racing as he stepped out of the Warden's office. His appeal was coming up. He'd been assigned a lawyer, given a date. *He had an appeal.* There was a very real chance he may get out of here a lot sooner than he thought – as early as a few *months* from now. He was at once filled with an equally overwhelming sense of hope and guilt. Billy had been so convinced this place would be his permanent home for the foreseeable future, that he'd be here for the next decade no matter how torturous it was, he'd let go of everything that tied him to the outside world.

He walked through the halls now, winding through his fellow inmates in a strange sort of daze. He needed to speak to him. He needed to hear Harrington's voice. Billy felt himself shaking, a nervous tightness in his chest as he approached the wall of phones, picking up the receiver and punching in Steve's number. The dial tone rang out in his ear, and he tried to steady his breathing as the phone began to ring.

It must have been half a year now since he'd heard Harrington's voice. Billy realised then, that he wasn't entirely sure if he could even remember exactly how Steve's voice sounded. It had become caricaturised over time, become more and more matter of fact, more and more ridiculously middle class. As the phone continued to ring, Billy became frightened Steve wouldn't pick up at all. And then, suddenly, the seemingly endless ringing stopped. Someone picked up. Billy's heart leapt.

"Hello?"

Billy found himself momentarily stunned, unable to answer, hands gripping hold of the receiver tighter and tighter with every passing second.

"Hello?! " Steve's voice sounded in his ear again.

“Steve?” Billy finally managed, feeling light headed, overwhelmed with anticipation. A painful silence followed. It may have been barely seconds, but it felt like a painful lifetime to Billy as he stood there in the crowded halls of the prison.

“...shit, Billy, is that you?” Steve’s voice finally crackled through the phone line.

And Billy felt so overwhelmed he could feel tears welling in his eyes, each breath he took now contributing to an increasingly exhilarating high.

“Yeah, Harrington, it’s me...” Billy said, tried to keep his cool, hating himself for *still*, after all this time, attempting to sound completely detached.

“Jesus, Billy. I...I haven’t heard from you in over six months...”

“I know, Steve, I know...” Billy nodded, averting his eyes to the ground. *As if Harrington can even see you right now?*

“Do you have any idea how painful it was, having to let go of you like that?”

“Look, listen to me, I’m sorry. OK, Steve? I am. I never meant to hurt you. You know that, right? Well, I wish you did.”

The phone line crackled, Billy was met with silence.

“Steve, are you there?”

“Yeah, Billy,” Steve sighed. “I’m here.”

“My appeal’s coming up,” Billy continued, tried to ignore the ominous tone in Steve’s voice. “Early next year, that’s what they told me today. I could be out within a few months. I could...we could... this could be our chance to start again. Just like we planned, yeah? Fresh start, far away from this Cowntown...”

Steve didn’t answer.

“You’re not talking, Harrington...” Billy stated, hand wrapped so

tight around the receiver now he was at risk of crumbling the damn thing between his palm. He couldn't catch his breath, couldn't stop himself from shaking now as he leaned in closer to the wall, free hand holding on to the phone box.

"You left me," Steve's voice came finally, quiet and solemn. "Do you know what that did to me? Do you how much that hurt?"

"Look, there's nothing I could ever say to take that back, but..." Billy was losing his train of thought, could hear Steve slipping away from him with every word. "Please. I wasn't thinking straight. I...I need you, Princess. I can't do this without you..."

"I mourned you. I mourned *us*, our life together. Do you understand that?"

"Well you don't have to mourn me anymore," Billy tried. "I'm here. Listen to me, *I'm here now*."

"I can't do this anymore, Billy."

And the tears in Billy's eyes were no longer simply a threat. They were spilling over, staining his cheeks as his eyes squeezed tightly shut. He pressed himself up against the phone box, feeling his heart twist, lurch, shatter.

"I never stopped loving you, Harrington," he swallowed back a sob. "Never, not for one single fuckin' day in this shithole."

"I know," Steve breathed, his own voice breaking slightly as he spoke now. "But you let me go, you pushed me away and you know what, Billy? I couldn't take that. I *can't* take that. It's taken me this long to let you go, and I can't just let you back in now, just because you call me out of the blue like this."

Whatever restraint Billy had had was gone now, his breaths coming out in choked sobs, head against the phone box, tears flooding his vision.

"Hey, come on Princess, if you wanna play hard to get, you win, OK?" Billy tried to laugh through the tears, cling on to any sort of hope.

"You broke my heart, Billy," Steve sniffed. "I can't let you do that again."

"Steve, please..."

"Good luck with your appeal, Bill."

Steve hung up the phone, and Billy was left with the harsh drone of the dial tone, and an audience of sneering inmates circling like predators, laughing and mimicking him.

'Boo hoo. I love you, Stevie boy, please don't leave me...'

'Don't break up with me, baby, don't I give the best head you've ever had?!'

'Hey, everyone, Hargrove's just been dumped! Anyone in the market for a new wife?!'

But Billy was too torn apart to even register the toxic crowds around him. He pushed his way through the hall, towards the yard. By the time he reached outside, his tears were gone, replaced now with a thousand mile stare. He'd lost everything, and in a way, it was a relief to have this confirmed.

"Hargrove, you're early," Stanford informed him, looking up to see Billy stood before him. "Shit, what's happened to you? You been crying? Your face is red raw!" He snorted.

"That offer still on the table?" Billy asked, ignored his question.

Stanford grinned, hand now resting over his pocket. "And what offer might that be?"

"Your new product," Billy muttered. "Perhaps you're right. Probably best one of us tries it out before we sell it, right?"

Stanford's grin widened, he glanced around the grounds, before reaching into his pocket and retrieving the baggie. He handed it over to Billy, who quickly shoved it into his own pocket.

"That a boy, Hargrove. Trust me, you won't regret it."

7. Just What I Needed

August, 1988

2,042 miles, 34.7 hours on the road, six motels. Chicago Shack, Dreamer's Inn, Ranger's Ranch, New Mexico Drive N' Dive, Desert Heroine. Partially defunct neon signs flickering in the night, deserted, beautiful landscapes and vibrating coin operated beds. The last place they had stayed, a motel attendant found a body in the pool the morning after their first night. OD, or so they'd heard. Spectators swarmed round the back of the motel to rubber neck at the scene as ambulances and cop-cars circled the place, cameras snapping through the closed, stained curtains of their room. They'd left a day early, put the miles in and gone the long stretch from Nevada to Cali in one go. It'd taken them eight days from start to finish before they reached their final destination.

Billy knew what would be waiting for him once he finally returned to Hawkins. He'd jumped into Steve's car a week ago and decided that *fuck it*, he'd take the crack in the face from Neil when he got back. Several hours in, he'd taken the wheel. He needed to retain some sort of control, and now the Camaro was gone, driving Pretty Boy Steve's car was the best he could get. Billy realised in Nevada, as they sped through the lonely desert landscape that night, that he'd never felt more alive in his entire life.

Steve's car was some flashy silver Porsche— open top rich kid ride, but Billy wasn't jealous. The cool night air whipped across his skin and through his hair as The Cars' 'Just What I Needed' blared out across the vacuous desert roads, and he was elated.

"Shit, I hope you appreciate Cali, Harrington," Billy grinned, blowing smoke out into the ether. "Cos this little runaway trip's gonna cost me, you know."

"Billy, if he hurts you, I'll..."

Billy laughed. "What did we say?"

"Yeah, yeah, no negative shit, or whatever. But..."

Billy reached for the volume on the stereo, turned it up to full blast. And maybe Steve was still talking, maybe he wasn't. Either way, Billy was back in his state of euphoria. This was the only place he wanted to be right now. Harrington by his side, heading back home, far away from all the bullshit.

Tonight was just about the two of them, and anyway, Billy was used to consequences, right now he had everything he needed, and consequences didn't mean shit.

'We are all, in a sense, stardust, created billions of years ago at the very first conception of time...'

"Swear to god, Harrington, I'm gonna get you back for this fuckin' bore-fest," Billy muttered, cigarette dangling from his mouth as the two of them stared back at the projection screen, a landscape of stars and galaxies staring back at them. Griffith Observatory, Steve's idea, and after Billy's encouragement to stop at Route 46 and pay homage to the late, great Jimmy Dean, Billy had felt obliged to indulge Harrington in his own nerdy detour.

"Billy, come on, you know you can't smoke in here. Jesus, will you put that out?"

Later that day, they'd driven up the hills until they reached the Hollywood sign. Steve had let Billy drive, and they'd parked up illegally (and diagonally, Billy could not park) right outside the 44ft landmark. The engine was still running as they approached the edge of the slope, stereo blaring out behind them. Billy's mixtape was on a loop, and for the fifth time that day, 'Just What I Needed' rang out across the hills as he cut Harrington short in mid-appreciation of the LA skyline, sticking his tongue down his throat and peeling his t-shirt off, pushing him down into the sandy dirt and fucking him in broad daylight, under the shadow of the Hollywood sign.

'I guess you're just what I needed, I needed someone to bleed...'

13th March, 1992

“Hey, Hargrove? Hello? Billy? Are you even listening to me?”

Billy blinked, the sound of The Cars still drifting around the room as he made the painful transition back to reality. Or whatever his current grasp of that was. He was high as shit. He had been for weeks, and the last thing he wanted to entertain right now was this suited up asshole with slicked back hair, extracting notes from his designer briefcase.

“Look, Billy, I’m your lawyer, OK? I need to understand who I’m representing.”

And Billy realised just a little too late he’d already burst out laughing.

Fuck. Sober up. You don’t wanna damage your...

“I’m delaying your appeal, Billy.”

That’ll do it.

“What?” Billy was wide awake now, glaring back at his lawyer in disbelief. “Whaddya mean, you’re *delaying* it? Why?”

Slick prick sighed, smoothing a hand through his hair.

“Listen, I know that deep down, you’re really not a bad kid. I’m on your side, Bill, really, I am. But the thing is...”

“The thing is, *what?!*” Billy snapped. “What, you think, you think I don’t have a chance of beating this wrap? You think that Neil was well in his right to beat the living crap outta my sister? It was OK for him to do the same to *me* for over a decade?! *What?!?*”

His lawyer sighed, straightened out the papers before him.

“Listen, kid, it’s got nothing to do with that. Like I said, I’m on your side. I believe you, OK? I wouldn’t have taken your case if I didn’t. It’s just that...it’s just...”

And Billy could already feel his lawyer’s eyes drawn to his arm,

towards the hole in it, the fresh track mark developing at the crook. He pulled his sleeve down, felt his chest swelling with shame.

“Just a few months, OK, kid? Get yourself sorted out. And then we can talk, alright?”

“Whatever,” Billy muttered. “I’m done here.”

He stood up, signalled for the guard to let him out of the conference room. That familiar, jarring buzz as he was let loose back into the halls of the prison, and suddenly, he was hit with an equally familiar itch for a top-up on his dwindling high. He needed to find Stanford.

“You know, Hargrove, I gotta say, you’re probably the neediest customer I have that doesn’t actually *pay* me for this shit,” Stanford muttered, leaning back against the generator and exhaling a mist of stale tobacco.

“What are you talking about, Stan? You know I make up for it,” Billy slurred. “I don’t see you doing the dirty work around here. When was the last time you made a new client, set up a deal? Squared some fuckin’ debts?!”

Stanford raised his eyebrows. “Don’t get cocky, Hargrove. Do you need reminding who it is that *protects* you in this place? I mean, shit, you’d have been dead a long time ago if it wasn’t for me.” He paused, gave Billy a once over. Billy was pale as shit, swaying, hair matted and drenched in sweat. Stanford laughed. “Speaking of which, perhaps you should calm down a little, huh? The way you’re going, you’re gonna end up in the prison cemetery before the year’s out.”

Billy snorted. “Jesus, I’m fine. I do my job don’t I?”

Stanford shrugged. “I guess you do, Hargrove. I guess you do.”

“So where are my goddamn employee benefits, huh?”

The gap between Stanford’s next response was a painfully drawn out, telling silence.

“Same as usual then?” Stanford finally spoke, digging into his pocket and handing out a small plastic baggie. “Go wild, kid.”

‘Stay strong, kid. If there’s one thing I know it’s that you just can’t control the shit that happens around you or to you. But, Billy, you gotta stay strong. Don’t let this fuckin’ world corrupt you, OK?’

“Mom?”

Billy was fucked. He lay back on the top bunk, eyes darting across the ceiling, searching for some, *any* sort of meaning in the crumbling plaster above him. Why was this happening to him? How had it got to this point?

He felt sick. Dizzy. His whole world was spinning, and he couldn’t move a muscle. He thought about Harrington. His mom. Max.

‘I’m sorry, Billy. I’m sorry this is the way things have turned out. I never planned for it to be this way...’

God. Was it just his imagination right now, or was he finding it hard to breath?

‘You’re my angel, Billy, you really are. And I’m going to make this right, for the both of us. He’s not gonna have a hold on us for much longer...’

Billy’s pillow was damp with a mixture of tears and sweat, hands coiling inward, face blank, eyes glazed over. He was shaking.

In the distance, he could hear his cell mate calling his name, someone shaking him. But he wasn’t there. All Billy could hear right now was the sound of Harrington’s stereo, playing that stupid fucking Cars song. He could feel the warm, Californian breeze against his skin, the smell of the asphalt.

And in that moment, Billy realised how much he truly did want to make a change, put the work into getting out of whatever this circle of hell he’d found himself in was.

But it was too late now. His eyes rolled back into his head, mouth

gaping open as he continued to shake, twitch and sweat. His body was succumbing, he was going under.

8. Girlfriend in a Coma

January 12th, 1980

“You wanna see a freak? I’ll fuckin’ show you a freak, you ever come near my kid again, assholes!”

The group of older teenagers scattered as Tonya Hargrove took a step towards them, car keys clenched in one hand, ponytail swinging violently back and forth and she marched in their direction.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought, you little shits!”

Hot pink false nails flicked the ash from her cigarette as she turned around and headed back to the car.

Billy watched the scene unfold from the passenger seat of his mother’s car. He felt a mixture of pride and embarrassment. As he watched her storming back to the car, he caught a glimpse of his own reflection in the passenger window. He hated his own reflection on the best of days, and right now, he could barely stand to look at himself. A dorky fat kid with a fat lip stared back at him. His face hurt, one of those bastards had landed a fist in his jaw when he’d refused to give up his arcade money. He reached into his pocket, hand wrapping around a fistful of change and a couple dollar bills. In a way, he was glad he hadn’t given in, but he could have done without a crack in the face three days before picture day.

Tonya had reached the car by now, yanking open the door and throwing herself into the driver’s seat.

“Fuckin’ bastards,” she muttered, shaking her head. She lit up another cigarette and rolled the window down. “Don’t take any crap from them, Billy, you hear? You’re a good kid. You don’t deserve that shit.”

Billy’s gaze averted to the floor. He didn’t say anything.

Tonya started the ignition, pulling the car into gear and reversing it out of the park’s entrance, engine roaring as it struggled to pull itself

out of the muddy ditch she had abruptly stopped the car in. Tonya could not park.

They'd been on the road for over ten minutes before Billy finally spoke.

"You didn't need to do that, you know."

"Didn't I, Billy?" Tonya asked. "You had that situation under control, huh? Those kids were about to kick the living shit outta you!"

Billy shrugged. "I was handling it, Mom."

Tonya shook her head, blowing a trail of smoke out the window.

"You gotta stand up for yourself, kid. Don't let them speak to you like that. You know, when I was growing up, I didn't live in such a nice area. When I was your age, I wasn't just dealing with a bunch of middle-class brats from the suburbs. I'm telling you, the kids back in Queens, they had no mercy. I learned to fight back, stand up for myself..."

"Stand up for yourself?" Billy interrupted. "You mean like, how you do with dad? Oh, wait. You don't, do you?"

Tonya was silent then, eyes fixed on the road. She took a long drag from her cigarette, and Billy could see her hands were shaking. *Why the hell did he say that?*

"I'm sorry, Mom," he said. "I didn't mean..."

"Listen, Billy. I'm gonna leave that man, OK? You gotta believe I'm trying. But it's hard. I haven't got the money right now, and...and he knows that..."

"Seriously, I shouldn't have said that..."

"No. No, you should have. You're right. I shouldn't take the fucked up shit I do from him. I stopped loving him the minute he laid a hand on me in front of you. You should have never seen that, and I'm sorry. But trust me, we're gonna get away someday. And in the meantime, you know I'd *never* let him hurt you..."

Billy nodded, felt his stomach twist in knots as he thought of returning home to that *house*, to the cruelty of his father, and an atmosphere so thick with hostility it could have been cut with a goddamn knife. He looked over to his mother then and saw tears brimming in her eyes. It was a bizarre, almost alien sight.

“Mom?”

Tonya’s false nails reached for the volume on the radio, turned up the song that had just come on.

‘Kid, what changed your mood, You’ve gone all sad, so I feel sad too...’

Tonya hummed along to the song, a smile emerging on her face. She dabbed at the bottom of her eyes with one hand in a swift, stoic motion and cleared her throat, fingers tapping on the steering wheel to the beat of the song.

“God, I love this song. You know, it reminds me of you, Billy.”

“Lame.”

“Hey, shut up, you little bastard! I’m not allowed to be sentimental now?” Tonya reached over and nudged him. They were both smiling now, and Tonya began to sing along.

*‘Your eyes are blue but you won’t cry,
I know, angry tears are too dear, you won’t let them go...’*

13th March, 1992

“Well, shit, what a stupid asshole. Is he dead?”

Warden Ainsley Knowles was not a compassionate man. He’d started hating the job about six months in, and by the time the first year was out, he’d more or less entirely lost the ability to see the inmates at Hawkins Penitentiary as fellow human beings. This sort of thing was a regular occurrence in his day to day work, and really, he found it hard to see some shithead punk OD’ing as anything more than an inconvenience for him. Billy had been pulled down from the top

bunk, a small crowd of guards now gathering around his seemingly lifeless body now, no one particularly wanting to be the first to inspect whether or not they were staring back at a corpse.

“Jesus Christ, will someone check his pulse already? That’s me stuck in the office ‘til the early hours of the fuckin’ morning. You know, I had tickets to a show tonight? So I’ve got Linda’s pissing and moaning to look forward to when I finally *do* step through the front door...and then there’s the legal shitstorm waiting for me when this shithead’s family get word that he’s snuffed it...”

“Isn’t this the kid who tried to kill his dad?”

“Shit, I hope so. Maybe then I won’t have a lawsuit on my hands at least...”

“He’s alive, sir,” one of the guards informed him.

“Oh...” Warden Knowles was visibly displeased, eyebrows raised and arms crossed as he observed the scene before him. Billy’s eyes had rolled so far back into his head by now that only the whites were showing, his skin paling by the second, a visible blue discoloration on his lips. Truth be told, Knowles hadn’t really had much faith in a responsive pulse.

“Guess I’m kissing goodbye to my weekend, then,” Knowles sighed. “Wilson, go get the medic, will you? Get this kid to the infirmary before he taps out and makes me look bad, yeah?”

They scrambled, several making their way out of the cell and down the hall, while the remaining guards began to drag Billy out into the hall by his legs.

“I’m gonna just take a wild guess here and assume the next of kin contact isn’t his parents,” Knowles muttered, watching as Billy was dragged across the floor with the caution one might apply to dragging a trash bag to the dumpster. “Do any of you know who he’s got down as an emergency contact?”

“Wasn’t it some guy his age?” a guard offered.

“Yeah, the one that used to visit. What was his name?” another

replied, narrowly avoided smacking Billy's head against the door frame as he was finally pulled out of the cell.

"Steve, I think. Steve something or other. You know, the rich kid with the nice car? What was he to this loser, anyway? Was he his brother or something?"

"Are you kidding me? This asshole is trailer trash through and through. They were lovers," one of the guards sneered.

"Quite frankly, I don't give a shit who they are to each other. I just need you to call him, OK? I'm not getting it in the neck from the council because we haven't followed procedure," Knowles muttered. "What's taking the medic anyway? I need this sideshow out of my halls before it gets a goddamn audience!"

With his insensitive closing remark, Knowles was gone, storming off down the hall and slamming the door to his office with dramatic effect.

In his comatose state, Billy had heard everything.

9. F My Ex

Summary for the Chapter:

Hope you all enjoy the update! Song in this chapter is 'Genius of Love' by Tom Tom Club. =]

October 5th, 1986

*'What you gonna do when you get out of jail?
I'm gonna have some fun...'*

Steve's hands ran through Billy's curls as he pressed against him, climbing awkwardly over the gear stick until he reached him, pressing up against him until he reached the passenger seat, pushing Billy against the condensate window, their tongues locked.

*'I'm in heaven, with my boyfriend, my laughing boyfriend
There's no beginning and there is no end, time isn't present in that dimension...'*

"Ain't you worried your parents are gonna see, Princess?" Billy smirked.

"Shut up, Hargrove," Steve grinned, mimicking his new boyfriend's rhetoric, pulling him closer, reaching lower, and promptly elbowing the car horn, setting it off. The jarring squeal of the car horn aired out across the drive of the Harrington household.

*'I'm in heaven
With the maven of funk mutation...'*

"Ah, shit!" Steve began fumbling with the controls as Billy watched on in amusement, licking his lips.

"Come on Harrington, let's go in and meet the folks, huh?"

"Did you make this yourself, Mrs Harrington?" Billy asked, polite and charming as ever as he took another mouthful. "This is delicious,

really.”

Steve took a sip of his orangeade and almost choked as he swallowed, feeling Billy’s foot press down on his crotch. He cleared his throat abruptly. Billy was chewing, smirking as he took a sip of his own drink.

“Why, yes, William, it’s an old family recipe,” Miriam Harrington beamed.

Steve held his tongue. His mother hadn’t cooked a meal in her entire life. Neither of his parents had. The food was from a local Italian restaurant, and his parents happened to be good friends with the owners.

“I’ve got to say, William, it’s nice to see Steven spending time with some decent folk in this town. He’s made some very bad choices with friendship groups in the past,” Michael Harrington announced, his business persona apparently not crashing at the office. “I’m sure Steven would be embarrassed to tell you this, but do you know, he was bullied pretty badly when he was at high school? You know, in his last year of high school he was beaten on by some hick so badly he needed minor stitches.”

And suddenly Billy’s bravado seemed to vanish. The game of advanced footsie ceased, and Billy swallowed his mouthful, blinked, seemed to be attempting to compose himself.

“Oh? That...uh...that sounds awful,” Billy muttered.

“Yes, truly awful, there’s some real No Hoppers in this town,” Mrs Harrington sighed. “And yet Steven refused to let us get involved. Always been the stoic type, haven’t you, Steven?”

“Leave it, Mom,” Steve sighed. “It’s ancient history.”

And suddenly Billy had lost his appetite. He set his knife and fork down and took another sip of his water, wishing to god it was something a little stronger. A familiar sensation of guilt washed over him, and he wished more than anything he could just disappear.

“Anyway, that’s not something we need to delve into right now, is

it?" Mrs Harrington shook her head, looking across to Billy. "William, I meant to ask, am I right in thinking your family's house is being fumigated at the moment?"

By now, Billy was wracked with anxiety.

"Oh, yeah, shit, I...uh..."

Both of Steve's parents raised their eyebrows at the curse, and Billy realised just a little too late that he'd uttered it.

"Yeah, Mom," Steve cut in, as quickly as possible. "Is it still OK for Billy to stay here tonight?"

There was a pause.

"Well, of course it is, sweetheart," Mrs Harrington smiled, snapping back into hostess mode. "Yes, William, you are welcome to stay the night. In fact, I believe Steven has even set the guest room up for you already. It's only a futon, but, it's quite comfy, I hope it will do..."

Billy stared back at Steve's mother blankly, unable to open his mouth in response, still overwhelmed with crippling guilt.

"That's great, Mom, thanks," Steve muttered.

Steve's family seemed to settle, returning to their meal, and shortly after, Billy felt Steve's foot rubbing against his leg under the table. This time, however, it was purely for comfort.

It was around 1am when Billy snuck out of the spare bedroom, padding across the hall to Steve's bedroom. The entire house was ice cold, wind howling through it, demonic moan, prompting memories Billy really wished he could forget. The Upside Down, the horrific reality of living in this simultaneously terrifying and boring Cowntown. He hated to admit it, but honestly, Billy felt afraid to continue living in this shithole every minute Steve wasn't here. And really, how *dare* he lean on Steve after what he did to him? Billy felt uncomfortable as he stepped into his boyfriend's room, clad in one of Steve's old shirts (*what shitty horror movie logo was it again? The Thing*

or some shit?) The two of them had barely spoken a word to each other since dinner.

“Steve?” Billy muttered, stepping into the darkness and attempting to focus his eyes. He reached for the light switch.

“Billy, no,” Steve murmured from the dark, voice heavy with sleep. There was a shuffling of covers, and suddenly Billy could make out Steve’s figure in the dim light, the turned up bedsheet by his side. “Shhh, come on, get in.”

He clambered into bed, gravitating towards the warmth of Steve’s body. He felt hesitant to move up any closer, but quickly felt Steve’s arms pull him in, encapsulating him, squeezing him tight. It was a bizarre experience for Billy. He wasn’t used to feeling so vulnerable, and he sure as shit wasn’t used to feeling this insecure.

“Steve?” he mumbled, pressed tight against his boyfriend’s chest.

“Mmmhmm?”

And Billy could feel himself shaking now, losing his nerve.

“I’m sorry,” he swallowed. “For everything.”

An icy cold wind breezed in through the window, and Steve’s grip on his shoulder tightened.

“It’s OK,” Steve whispered softly. “I forgive you, Billy.”

And Billy wished he could cry, wished he could feel anything but the torturous sensation of guilt and sadness. Instead, he leaned into Steve’s embrace, and tried to forget.

17th March, 1992

*‘If you see him, please remind him, unhappy boyfriend
Well he’s the genius of love, he’s got a greater depth of feeling...’*

Billy woke up to a spinning ceiling and the shitty flickering lights of a prison hospital ward. At first, it was hard to understand what was going on, where he was, what had happened.

And then he felt a palm clamp over the top of his.

“Billy? Bill? Can you hear me?”

Billy realised now that his eyelids were fluttering. What the hell was going on? *Had he been in a fucking coma or some shit?*

“You’ve been in a coma, Billy,” Steve Harrington was telling him. *Jesus, Harrington was here, and he was fucking crying?! Harrington was holding his fucking hand.*

Billy didn’t know what to say, eyes darting around the room, trying to suss it out for inconsistencies. This shit had to be a dream.

“Am I dreaming, or is that really you, Princess?”

“Yeah, Bill, it’s me. I’m here,” Steve sighed, rubbed Billy’s hand. His voice seemed solemn. Too solemn and over dramatic even for him. “You know, I had to bribe the guard to even let me in here with you.”

What did I do?

“What did I do?” Billy asked, voice croaky, bleary eyes struggling to focus. He felt like shit, and the feel of Harrington’s warm palms against his was the most genuinely comforting sensation he’d experienced in years. For the briefest moment, he truly felt like a human being.

“What did you do, Billy?” Steve asked, eyes welling with tears. “You’re seriously asking me that?”

Billy swallowed, feeling the tears escape his own eyes, spilling down his cheek, his expression contorting.

“I’m sorry, Steve,” he sobbed. “I just didn’t know what to do.”

Billy felt himself being pulled up slightly from his hospital bed then,

Harrington holding him as close as possible. Billy, still in a daze, reached out and attempted to wrap his arms around Steve, feeling the sudden, painful jolt of the handcuffs against his wrists.

“Shit!” Billy spat. “Shit! Shit! Shit! What the fuck is this?! I can’t use my fucking arms now?!”

“Shhh, come on, Billy. It’s alright,” Steve murmured, rubbing Billy’s back and encasing his ex’s trembling form.

But Billy was inconsolable now, head pressed against Steve’s chest, tears flowing uncontrollably. Maybe it was the drug withdrawal, perhaps it was the distress of awakening from a four day long coma, but right now, all Billy could do was cry.

And that’s when Steve realised, as he held the broken mess that was once his boyfriend, that he had to help.

“Billy,” Steve muttered, leaning in and holding him tight. “You can’t stay here. And I’m not going to let you. Shit, I’ve been avoiding it, but I know what I need to do. I know how to get you out of this hellhole for good.”

10. My Sister

Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks for everyone's support on this story so far, it means a real lot to me! I have the whole chronology of this story planned out from start to finish now, so I'm super excited about that! Hope you all enjoy the chapter =D

30th August, 1986

“Do you really have to go back so soon, Princess?” Billy smirked, hand reaching around Steve’s side, pulling him into another kiss.

“Shit, Billy, it almost sounds like you’re gonna miss me,” Steve smirked, leaning into the kiss.

“Fuck you, Harrington,” Billy grinned.

The evening was creeping in, the sky now a pink-orange backdrop over the safety of Hawkins Mall’s deserted parking lot. ‘Eyes Without a Face’ rang out from the Camaro’s radio as Billy pushed Steve up against the bonnet, feeling the freedom of anonymity as he indulged himself in the moment. Harrington was everything to him. Being with him was the only real release he experienced from the day to day bullshit. His anger, his misery, the aching longing, and the fucking physical and emotional pain that was his home life.

It had been a great summer, every spare moment between Billy’s shifts at the garage had been spent together. Today felt bittersweet. Harrington had been back for almost a month now, and today was the very last day Billy would get with him. It would be the last time he’d see him for a while. Steve was too busy to travel back and forth from Princeton constantly, and Billy didn’t have the sort of money that allowed him to travel himself (and he sure as hell wasn’t about to ask Harrington for it).

“Come on, Billy, I gotta get back to my folks’.” Steve pulled away from Billy slightly. “My mom’s got that stupid meal booked for

eight.”

“You mean, the leaving do you never asked for?” Billy was still smirking, tongue running over his front teeth. “If you say so, Princess.”

“I wish you could come with me,” Steve sighed. “I wish I could just tell them about us...”

The sudden squeal of tires against asphalt broke their gaze, and the both of them turned their attention to the entrance of the parking lot. Billy’s eyes set upon the blue pick-up truck, and his heart leapt immediately.

“Shit, people in this town,” Steve muttered. “Doesn’t anyone know how to drive? Billy? Hey, Bill? You alright?”

Billy was frozen, continuing to stare on at his father’s truck in abject horror, feeling the onset of nausea and anxiety hard.

“Bill? You there? Anyone home?”

Neil Hargrove’s truck squealed away as quickly as it had arrived, and suddenly Billy felt himself fall into a world of his own, away from the blissful comfort he’d felt only moments before.

“Billy, what’s the matter? Do you know that asshole or something? Come on, talk to me.”

He was vaguely aware of Harrington shaking his arm, but his racing thoughts prevented him from responding.

He followed me here. He knew all along. I’m dead. I’m fucking dead.

Billy turned to Steve finally, tried his best to shake off the bravado.

“Jesus, calm down, Princess, I’m fine,” he muttered. “Get in the car, I’ll drive you home.”

Despite every effort on Steve’s part, they drove home with barely a

couple of sentences exchanged. Billy gripped the steering wheel as hard as he could the entire time, the only thing he could think to do in order to steady his nerves. By the time he pulled up at Steve's driveway, he was a complete wreck.

"Billy?" Steve asked as they reached his driveway. "Is this about me going back to Princeton?"

"Get over yourself, Harrington," Billy snorted, shaking his head. "Go on already, get out."

He knew Harrington wasn't buying it. And he also knew he was too polite to pry. Steve didn't know a lot about Billy's home life, and the last thing Billy was going to do was spew his guts to him now. It wouldn't make any difference. It wouldn't change a damn thing about what was going to happen when he got home. And yet, a small, pathetic part of him wished he *would* tell Steve, wished he could escape the inevitable, stay with Harrington at his home and never return to that hellhole.

"I love you, Billy," Steve smiled. "I'm gonna miss you. But I'll be back in no time, alright?"

Billy felt a lump in his throat. "Don't be so soft, Princeton," he grinned.

Steve leaned in, pressing his lips against Billy's, encasing him in an uncomfortably tight embrace. Billy leaned into the kiss, holding Steve tight, kissing back just a little too hard for a goodbye kiss. But something in him told him this may very well be the last kiss they ever shared.

"I love you too, Princess," Billy muttered, a sad smile creeping across his face. "Don't be a stranger, huh?" he laughed, hearing his voice catch at the last word.

The idea of facing his father's wrath was terrifying enough, but the most terrifying concept was that he may never be able to see Steve again. The idea that this, right now, may be their very last moment together? It shook Billy to his core, an aching pain in his chest as he felt Steve's arms pull away, watched as his boyfriend stepped out of

the Camaro and headed down the drive to his parent's house.

He should have told Steve about Neil a long time ago. And now it may be too late.

I'm sorry. I'm so fucking sorry.

The house was silent and dark as Billy got in save for the distant murmuring of the television and the dim light from the lounge. Billy's heart was already hammering against his chest as he shoved his car keys into his back pocket rather than in the key bowl by the windowsill. After all, he might need them in the fairly immediate future. He took his jacket off and hung it up, finding himself shaking so much his balance was off, turning around and managing to knock a lamp off the foyer table beside the coat rack. It hit the floor with a percussive clatter, and Billy's breath hitched in anticipation.

"Jesus, what the hell was that?" Neil's voice boomed from the other room.

There was the sound of the lounge door creaking open, steel toe capped boots against the floorboards. And Billy found his breathing becoming increasingly shallow, frozen to the spot and wishing his pride would just allow him to turn back out of the front door and run. Neil appeared in the doorway, and instead, Billy tried his best to remain calm, feign ignorance and stand his ground. It was all he could really do.

"Oh, it's you," Neil muttered, setting his beer down on the kitchen table and making his way in to the hall. "You have fun on your date with Judy Watson, huh?"

Billy blinked back the terrified tears threatening to fall and swallowed.

"Yeah, Dad, it was...it was alright, not really my type though, I guess," he tried to laugh, find any way possible of staving off his father's suspicions. "She's a nice girl, though. Great set of personalities, you know what I mean?"

Neil Hargrove was smiling, but there was no humour there, his eyes glinting as he closed the gap between Billy and himself until he was stood at an intimidatingly close proximity.

“Oh yeah? Is that right?” Neil asked, his eyes searching over Billy’s as if he were trying to pry the truth from him with a single glance. “And what exactly would you say is your type, Billy?”

Billy forced another fake laugh, tried to remain calm, convince himself that maybe, just *maybe*, Neil hadn’t seen a thing, had been there purely by coincidence. But his façade was slipping. This man scared the shit out of him.

“Oh, Jesus, I don’t know. The girls at Hawkins, they’re all kinda...you know...”

“No, Billy, I don’t...” Neil Hargrove shook his head. “I’ll tell you what I do, though. I know a liar when I see one. And I sure as hell know a dirty fucking faggot when I see one too.”

The tears fell from Billy’s eyes before he could answer, betraying him.

“Listen, Dad, it’s not what you...”

Neil’s fist slammed into Billy’s nose with such force it knocked him to the ground, and as he hit the floor and pulled himself back towards the bottom of the staircase, Billy had to take a couple of seconds to register what had just happened. He watched helplessly as Neil advanced on him.

This is it. He’s going to kill me.

“Dad, please, I can explain...” he sobbed, knowing that really, there was no point in wasting his breath. He braced himself for the next hit, closing his eyes, and trying to disappear to the safety of his own mind. This was a regular trick of his he’d used in the past, and as bizarre as it may have seemed, it sort of worked. His piece of shit father may have been kicking the shit out of him, but he wasn’t there. Not really. His mind was somewhere else, focusing away from the pain and remembering a happier time. His mother, his life in Cali,

Harrington...

But right now, it wasn't working. He couldn't think of a damn thing. He knew that this time, it wouldn't be OK, and he was too fucking frightened to just let go. He didn't want to die. Not now. Not like this.

"I always knew you were going to bring me shame, boy. Known it for years, but this? This is beyond even what I expected..."

"Neil! Stop!"

Billy opened his eyes, hearing the frantic footsteps descending down the stairs, watching the flash of long red hair as he saw his step-sister jump in front of him, her arms held out by her sides protectively.

What the fuck, Max?

Billy's eyes widened in shock, as did Neil Hargrove's.

"Maxine, I thought you were away with your mother tonight," Neil muttered.

Of course, he'd never have dared to show the full extent of his wrath towards Billy with Max in the house. Neil Hargrove was a monster but he certainly wasn't stupid. He knew Max would tell her mother if she ever witnessed what *really* went on when she was out of the house.

"I didn't want to go," Max muttered, looking back to Billy, a horrified look creeping across her face as she spotted the blood from his busted nose. "Why did you hit him?"

"Well, Maxine, your brother was being disrespectful. And I won't tolerate that in my home," Neil hissed through gritted teeth, attempting to placate her long enough to get between her and Billy. "Now, please. Step aside, Maxine."

"No!" Max protested, lowering her arms and rushing over to where Billy lay slumped against the stairwell. To Billy's complete bewilderment, she threw her arms around him, crouching over him like some sort of human shield. "You leave him alone, or I'll tell my

Mom what you did.”

Billy felt a rush of combined gratefulness and guilt. What had he ever done for Max to deserve this? How could he have treated her so badly for so long?

For a moment, it seemed as if his father was not about to let up, fists still balled and enraged stare still spread across his face. Billy felt tempted to push Max away as he looked back at him, worried he might actually turn his rage on his step sister in order to hurt Billy by proxy.

“I’m going out. I won’t be back tonight. You make sure you watch your sister in the meantime,” Neil Hargrove muttered finally, turning and marching down the hall, yanking his jacket off the coat rack so aggressively it fell to the floor. The door slammed behind him, and moments later, the sound of screeching tires could be heard from outside. He was gone.

Max let go of Billy immediately, standing up and offering her hand to him. He shook his head, getting up on his own.

“Are you OK?” Max asked, her voice clipped and curt, but her eyes were full of traitorous compassion.

“I’m fine,” Billy muttered, wiping the blood from his face.

“Good,” Max replied, arms folded.

There was a drawn out silence between the two step-siblings then, and finally, Billy decided to swallow his pride, looking back up towards Max.

“Thank you, for doing that,” he said. “I mean it.”

Max’s expression softened slightly, but her arms remained folded.

“It’s alright,” she murmured. “He does that to you a lot more than I know about, doesn’t he? Is that where you really get the bruises from? I thought you got them from fighting people...”

Billy paused, debated whether or not telling Max the truth was really

a good idea. Say he did tell her, then what? She'd tell Susan, and then one of two things would probably happen – Susan would leave and he'd lose his stepsister, or Susan would stay, and maybe Max and her mom would be next?

“No,” Billy shook his head. “No, he was just mad. I pissed him off with something I said, that's all.”

Max nodded. “Ok.” She began to make her way back up the stairs, stopping suddenly half way up. “You don't deserve to be hurt, Billy,” She told him. “And neither do I, OK?”

“Max, look, I'm sorry for everything that's—“

“Siblings look out for each other,” Max cut in. “Always.”

With that, she crept up the stairs and disappeared into her room.

Neil Hargrove returned three days later, and the sighting at the mall was not spoken of again.

Notes for the Chapter:

PS Chapter title was taken from 'My Sister' by Juliana Hatfield Three.

11. Taste the Pain

April 6th, 1985

*'Midnight to six man
For the first time from Jamaica...'*

"Crash my car, you little shit, and I swear to God..."

"I'm not gonna crash your shit wagon, asshole, calm down! Now tell me what to do!"

"Well, for starters, you need to put it into gear before you slam on the accelerator."

"I have done! Jesus!"

The Camaro's radio blared out into the abandoned race track. It was a well-known spot to the residents of South Hawkins, but on an early Sunday Morning, it seemed that Billy and Max were the only people enthusiastic and awake enough about to be here. This place was really only utilised for two things—drag races and illegal driving lessons. Today they were engaging in the latter. Billy wasn't sure why he'd agreed to Max's request, but he was pretty sure it had something to do with the guilt he felt over the events at the end of last year.

*'Cause it won't get you anywhere
Fooling with the guns...'*

"OK, now you need to push down on the accelerator pedal, but make sure you..."

Max slammed her foot down on the accelerator, and the car sped forward, MPH dial flicking over. The Camaro jolted, and stalled.

"Jesus Christ Max! I said gently, didn't I?!"

"No! You didn't! You said, 'push down on the accelerator'!"

"I said, push down gently! You got something wrong with your fuckin' hearing all of sudden?!" Billy snapped.

“Screw you, Billy!” Max snapped, undoing her seatbelt and reaching for the car door.

*‘White youth, black youth,
Better find another solution...’*

Billy felt a sudden pang of regret as Max clicked the car door, and he found himself reaching out to the car door to stop her.

“C’mon, don’t do that,” he muttered. “Sorry for snapping at you, alright? Just...I don’t want you to crash, alright?”

Max frowned, but eventually took her hand off the door, strapping herself back in.

“Why are you even helping me?” she asked, turning the car back into gear and pressing on the accelerator, steering ahead.

Billy didn’t respond, felt a lump rising in his throat.

*‘Punk rockers in the UK, they won't notice anyway
They're all too busy fighting...’*

“No dumbass explanation, huh? Not like you.”

“Listen, Max...”

“You know what pisses me off the most, Billy?” Max sighed. “I knew you were an asshole from the minute we met. I’ve always known that. But I never knew you were...I never thought you were a bigot.”

Billy felt his blood chill then, found himself frozen as Max effortlessly rounded the corner of the track.

“What the fuck are you on about?” he snapped, voice losing its nonchalant façade halfway through.

“What the fuck am I on about? *Really*, Billy?” Max laughed incredulously, turning another corner sharply, engine revving. “Are you really so in denial that I have to spell it out for you?!”

“Well *shit*, Max, I guess I am!” Billy snapped then, knowing exactly,

but dreading to hear, her next words.

“*Lucas*, Billy! *Lucas*! It’s been months and you’ve never so much as uttered a word about what happened!”

“Lucas Sinclair? What about him?! You’re not even with the kid anymore!” He was on the defensive now.

Max’s fingernails dug into the steering wheel as she slammed on the accelerator, zooming across the track, speeding past the next corner with the precision of a stunt driver.

“I give up!” she spat finally. “My friends were right, weren’t they? You’re just a fucking racist asshole!”

Billy’s stomach flipped then. He felt the anger emitting from Max’s very pores, and he had no words to justify anything to her.

“Max, listen, I...Lucas...I don’t feel that way anymore...”

“You think Neil’s gonna give you a pat on the back for copying off him, huh, Billy? You wanna be a racist piece of shit like him? I mean...” Another swift turn around the track, the smell of burning rubber. “I mean... where’s your badge of honour? Now that you’ve basically transformed into him, and all? Was it that black eye he gave you at Christmas?!”

“Max...slow down...”

“Seems like kind of a shitty reward, huh?”

“Swear to god, Max, you better shut your goddamn mouth *right now*, before I...”

“Oh, shut up, Billy! Before you *what*? You sound like a broken record!” Max snapped back, now practically in tears as the speedometer steadily crept higher and higher. “You think you taking me out in your car is gonna make me forget or something? You think I’m gonna forget how much of a racist piece of shit you are because you let me drive your shitty car around for a couple hours?!”

“Max! Seriously!” Billy was shouting now. “Slow the fuck down!”

“OK, Billy! I’ll slow down! I’ll slow down the minute you admit you were wrong! The minute you admit what you did!”

By this point, all Billy could feel was a burning hot sensation of intense guilt. Because, really, he knew Max was right. He knew his actions towards Lucas Sinclair had been wrong, and he knew they’d more or less been entirely motivated by some sad, pathetic need to impress his bigot of a father.

The wheels of the Camaro screeched as Max sped around yet another corner, and Billy heard the words escape his mouth before he’d even been able to process them.

“I was wrong, alright, Max? I was wrong! And it was fucking disgusting what I did! To you...to Lucas...the way I treated both of you, OK? And I’m...” Billy throat tightened as he felt the familiar burning of tears threatening, the tightness in his throat. “Look, I’m sorry! I’m fucking sorry, I really am!”

His voice broke at the last word, and within seconds, Max had slammed on the brakes, screeched the car to a halt.

“Maybe you should try saying that to Lucas,” she snarled, opening the door of the driver’s seat and crossing over the side of the car until she was in the backseat. “I’m done. Drive me home, asshole.”

They drove home in complete silence, and later on, Billy spent a good hour or so in his room in a state of complete panic of guilt and shame. *How could someone so much younger than himself be so good at seeing him, breaking down his facades, calling him out on his pathetic bullshit?*

After dinner, Billy drove out to the Sinclair household under the guise of picking up a new part for his car before the garage shut. Tonight would be the first night he’d really ever felt thankful for his step-sister. She was a better person than he was, or would probably ever be.

April 3rd, 1992

“Hey, where’d you find this food, sweetheart? You scoop it outta the trash outside?! I swear, every time I come here, your food is shit. This is the worst diner in Cali, you know that?”

Then why do you keep coming here? Lucy Litchfield wished she could say it.

The surly trucker practically hurled the plate of food across the diner’s table, and Lucy had to do everything in her power to keep her anger in.

“I’m sorry it wasn’t to your taste,” she smiled, eyes blank and voice deadpan as she took the plate off the asshole that had practically thrown it at her. “Wait right here, we’ll make you another one.”

She returned to the kitchen and set down the unsatisfactory plate.

“Redneck fuckface at the counter doesn’t like his eggs,” Lucy muttered to the kitchen staff.

“Let me guess, green plaid jacket, ginger tash?” Benicio the kitchen assistant asked.

“The very fucking same, Benicio,” Lucy sighed, heading towards the cloakroom, rifling through her coat until she found her packet of Marlboros.

“He’s an asshole, boss,” Benicio called back to her from the kitchen. “You want me to spit in his eggs? You know, I’ve got some laxatives in my car, from that sickness I had a few weeks back? You want me to go get ‘em and crush them up? Stick them in that prick’s food?”

Lucy grinned at the thought, pulling out a cigarette and sticking it into the pocket of her waitress uniform.

“Nah, Beni,” she shook her head as she called back. “Not worth the trouble. Just get this bastard his eggs so he can eat them and fuck off.”

“If you say so, boss, but I gotta say, you’re a hell of a lot more forgiving than I would be,” Benicio called back, a hint of disappointment in his tone.

Lucy headed to the fire exit, clicking it open and wandering out into the parking lot. She lit up her cigarette.

Today had not been a good day.

The humid Californian air was overpowering, and Lucy could barely taste the smoke of her cigarette against the scent of melting asphalt and fried food as she took her first drag. When she’d first opened this franchise, she’d hoped the diner would be a fresh start. A steady wage coming in, a decent place to live, far away from the disastrous shitstorm that had been her childhood, what could go wrong? Everything, apparently.

Lucy finished her cigarette, stubbed it out with her sneakers, and headed back into the kitchen. At once, she heard a commotion coming from the diner. The clattering of cutlery, and two men shouting their mouths off.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” she sighed, sprayed herself with some shitty dime store body spray, and headed into the diner.

“You tryin’ ta tell me you cooked this fresh?! This shit tastes worse than the last batch!” The moustached trucker was screaming at Benicio now.

“Look, dude, this is a budget diner, OK? You want a first class dining experience, why don’t you head on over to the Hilton!” Benicio snapped.

And Lucy had had enough.

“Hey, asshole,” she called, storming over to the counter and leaning into the enraged customer. “You know what? You’re fuckin’ barred, OK? We don’t need or want your custom here anymore. Get out!”

The trucker snorted, pulled away from his seat with a cringe inducing screech of chair leg against tiles, and stood up.

“This how you talk to all of your customers, huh, Red?” he snarled. “No wonder this shithole ain’t taking any money.”

Lucy watched him walk out, finding herself silently but very steadily approaching breaking point.

“Shit, Luce, you OK?” Benicio asked, eyes travelling to her nails, now embedding themselves in her forearm.

Lucy took a minute to come to.

“What? Yeah. Yeah I’m fine,” she breathed, tried to shake it off. She paused for a moment, hesitating to ask. “Beni, you OK with taking over the shift? I’ve got somewhere to be.”

It was about 3pm now. The midday traffic had died off almost completely, and Lucy was able to slip through the streets of LA in her car freely. Eventually, she found herself driving through the valley, far away from home. She didn’t want to think or feel a thing. She stuck her shades on and rolled the top down, letting the breeze blow through her hair. After a couple minutes, Lucy flipped the radio on.

‘Hotel California’ blasted through the speakers, and Lucy flipped her head back, letting her hair fly wild against the air. She put a cigarette to her mouth.

Lucy had arrived in Cali in 1989. A snap decision. She’d taken the Greyhound couch the morning after her step-brother was arrested, not looking back. Instead of college, she’d settled for a series of low paying waitressing jobs in California, purely to escape the misery of her family life back home, eventually managing to rise to Manager status in a shitty roadside diner. But it wasn’t enough. Dissatisfaction didn’t even scratch the surface of what Lucy felt in regards to her new life. Instead of an escape, her supposed refuge in Cali had lead to a spiralling tunnel of despair.

The night her step brother had been arrested, she’d stayed with his boyfriend. He’d plied her with platitudes. *Everything’s going to be OK eventually, it won’t be like this forever, trust me.* He’d repeated that shit

all night. *Won't it? Won't it, really?!* She'd asked herself.

The next day she'd fled, stole a couple hundred dollars from her step-brother's ridiculously naïve boyfriend's safe, hot-tailed it out of town and changed her name legally. For three long years now, she'd semi-successfully erased the past, and tried to move on, and for that, she was proud of herself.

The track changed, and a familiar Clash song rung out through the radio.

*'Midnight to six man
For the first time from Jamaica...'*

And suddenly, Lucy felt very, very alone. A lump in her throat formed, and her chest tightened. At the next junction, she swerved back towards the direction of the diner.

Notes for the Chapter:

Song on the radio is '(White Man) In Hammersmith
Palais' by The Clash =]

I'm honestly in love with this song atm.

12. Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds

Notes for the Chapter:

Song featured in lyrics is 18 & Life by Skid Row, which is an awesome song! As always, thanks for reading, and to all the followers of this story, ILY!!!
=D

1st May, 1992

*'Ricky was a young boy, he had a heart of stone,
Lived nine to five and worked his fingers to the bone...'*

Steve switched the radio on, pulling his shades up to watch the bluebottle buzzing back and forth from dashboard to windscreen. Back and forth. Back and forth. He'd opened the window several minutes ago and still, the thing continued to smash itself against the solid screen before it.

"Come on, buddy, figure it out," Steve muttered, pulling his shades back down. Even under the cover of the gas station roof, the sunlight was overpowering. It'd been so long, he'd forgotten just how different Cali was to Indiana.

Finally, Nancy emerged from the pay station, clad in her own set of shades and a pair of denim mini shorts he'd seen her wearing on one of their first dates. It was weird, in all honesty, the two of them being together alone like this, after so many years.

"All set?" Steve asked, as Nancy climbed into the passenger seat of the Hire Car.

"Yeah, all set. The cashier was an asshole though, tried to charge us a third on the gas," Nancy sighed. "Don't worry, I set him straight."

Steve noticed her slip the bottle of Tylenol into her bag.

"You feeling alright, Nance?"

"Yeah, just a little queasy. I think it was the flight, you know. I'm not

a good flyer. Makes me nervous. I guess that's why I was hurling in the plane."

They'd made the decision to fly out to Cali a week ago. Steve had arrived at Nancy's front door, practically ecstatic, thrusting a brown envelope at her and grinning from ear to ear.

'Nancy, say hello to Lucy Litchfield.'

'Oh my god, Steve, you found her?!'

'Hell yeah I did. I mean, technically, the PI found her, but I'm willing to take the credit!'

'I'm coming with you.'

Steve hadn't objected. Truth be told, the idea of seeking out Max after all this time sounded daunting enough, and having someone there he knew? Well it would at least alleviate some of the anxiety, surely.

Surely.

"What if she doesn't come back with us, Nance? What if she doesn't agree to testify?" Steve found himself asking as they pulled out of the gas station.

"Steve, she *will*," Nancy assured him. "Look, Max ran because she was scared. But it's been years now. Once she knows how much Billy needs her, she'll come back. I know she will."

Steve nodded, wanting to believe Nancy, yet not believing her at all.

"Billy's lucky to have you as a boyfriend, you know," Nancy remarked, as they sped on down through the desert highway. "Really lucky."

Then why wasn't I enough for you?

Steve blinked back the intrusive thought in shock.

"He's not my boyfriend anymore, Nance, you know that."

“Whatever you say Steve,” Nancy laughed. “You’ve loved that guy *long* before I’d have approved of it.”

Summer, 1985

It was around midday when Steve Harrington’s Beamer rolled into Hawkins Motors. Lord knows, Steve would have gone *anywhere* else, but the Hargroves had bought out the previous owner of the local mechanics, and the next nearest was at least 80 miles south of Hawkins. Steve’s only hope was that Neil Hargrove’s *spawn* wasn’t hanging around the place.

He knew he’d made a mistake the minute he pulled up, the sound of high pitched hair metal wailing through the air as he rolled his window down.

Fuck. Of course. Of course Billy works here.

“Oh, fuck me,” Steve muttered as he parked the car up, suddenly debating how willing he was to slam the car into reverse and drive on 80 miles out of town.

“Car trouble, pretty boy?”

He jumped, spotting Billy’s smirking fucking face, leaning into the open window. Billy was dressed in dirty, oil stained overalls, oil rag hung over his shoulder, tongue flicking over his teeth and a wild glint in his eyes. Steve had never wanted to punch someone in the face so much in his entire life.

“I see you’re moving on and up in the world, Hargrove,” Steve muttered. “Grease monkey, now are you?”

Billy took the cigarette from behind his ear, placed it between his lips, and laughed. “You jealous, Princess?”

“Why the hell would I be jealous of *you*, shitface?” Steve snarled, undoing his seatbelt and stepping out of his car.

“I could think of a few reasons,” Billy grinned, fluttering his

eyelashes before heading over to the work bench. Steve watched as he searched around for several seconds, finally pulling a Zippo out of a draw.

“You’re covered in flammable liquid, you know. Be careful you don’t burst into flames, Hargrove,” Steve called over to him. “Would be a real tragedy to this town to lose someone like you.”

And why the fuck was there something in Steve that was genuinely concerned about Billy’s hazardous smoking habits?

Billy laughed, lit up and swaggered back over in Harrington’s direction, giving the Beamer a once over.

“What’s up with this shitwagon, then, Harrington? You been screwing too many guys in the backseat, bust a tyre or something?”

“Fuck you, asshole,” Steve muttered. “Engine’s acting up. Keeps stalling.”

“Doesn’t surprise me, these cars are pieces of shit,” Billy remarked, blowing a torrent of smoke in Steve’s direction before slamming his fist down on the hood, pulling it open and taking a look inside.

Steve watched as Billy leant over the engine.

He’s got a pretty nice ass for a shithead douchebag.

“What the fuck?” Steve blurted, aloud.

“What?” Billy pulled away from the motor, brow furrowed.

“*What?*” Steve mirrored, feigned ignorance, cringing internally at the unwanted intrusive thought.

“You’re fuckin’ weird, Harrington,” Billy muttered, turning his attention back to the Beamer.

Steve waited, tried to distract himself with anything other than watching Billy Hargrove checking out his BMW. But it was hard. *And why the hell was it?* A couple minutes passed, and Steve found himself feeling a horrible, unwarranted urge to stare at Billy, to watch him

work.

What the hell, Steve?

It made sense, Steve reasoned with himself. Billy was an attractive guy. An asshole, sure. But that didn't change facts, unfortunately. He was jealous of him, probably. Billy was everything he'd aspired towards, aesthetically at least, he could happily leave the white trash element, and the personality, that was garbage too. It wasn't like he was fucking attracted to the guy or anything. After everything this prick had done, that would be...

"It's fucked, alright," Billy said, slamming the hood down. "It'll be a hundred dollars, pretty boy. You can pick it up on Friday."

Steve snapped out of his train of thought then, took a few moments to process what the other had said.

"Right," he said finally, reaching into his wallet and handing the money over to Billy. "Well, you best make sure it works afterward, Hargrove."

Billy grinned, snatching the money off Steve and shoving it into the pocket of his overalls.

"See ya Friday, Princess."

Steve had spent the next five days questioning his every thought. For some reason, he couldn't get the exchange with Billy Hargrove a few days ago out of his head. The worst part was, this wasn't the first time he'd found himself fixating on this pile of white trash.

Steve had realised, over the coming week, that he'd felt something the first time he ever set eyes on this asshole. In all honesty, the minute Billy had pulled up in his Camaro and swaggered onto the grounds of Hawkins High, cigarette dangling out of his mouth, Steve knew there was something in himself that wasn't being fulfilled.

And he hated himself for it.

Steve arrived at Hawkins Motors midday Friday, found himself flooded with a sense of anticipation, excitement even, as he stepped across the concrete floors of the garage. He spotted his car immediately, ready and waiting, all cleaned up and shining, presumably fixed. The familiar screech of Metallica rang out from the work station as Steve scanned the place for signs of life.

There was a clang of metal against hard surface, and within seconds, Billy emerged, face smeared with oil, and what appeared to be a black eye. And Steve cursed himself for the first words that emerged from his mouth.

“What happened to you?”

Billy snorted. “Car stuff, why do you care?”

Steve felt his cheeks burn, wondering why the *hell* he’d asked. He straightened himself up, cleared his throat.

“So, you fixed my car or what?”

“Yeah. I fixed it. All sorted, Harrington. Now you can drive to the Country Club with no fear at all,” Billy taunted, throwing Steve’s keys in his direction.

Despite the overpowering music, Steve suddenly felt as if the two of them were suspended in complete silence. He skipped a beat. Several beats. He wasn’t thinking about how good Billy looked in his Mechanic’s overalls, or how hot his hair looked slicked back away from his face, oil smeared across his left cheek. Why would he be thinking about that?

“Thanks, asshole,” he finally managed to spit out.

“Don’t worry about it, Princess.”

“Don’t fuckin’ call me that, OK?”

“Sure thing, Princess,” Billy winked, smile spreading across his face.

Steve drove home that afternoon with a bizarrely longing ache in his chest, a sensation he hadn’t felt since freshman year of High School.

It was constant, and hurt like hell.

It had been around a week since Harrington had picked up his car. He'd probably gone back to whatever Ivy League college he'd escaped to by now, Billy supposed. He pulled up the car jack and wheeled himself out from underneath the car he'd been fixing, cigarette hanging from his mouth.

Billy had spent the past week pining over the bastard, over the unspoken words, the facades he'd used, and regretting the residual anger he'd expressed. Because Steve Harrington didn't love him. He'd never love him. *And fuck, after the events that took place last year, why would he ever?*

He shook it off, got up, heading in the direction of the garage's exit, hoping he'd actually remembered to bring the spare can of WD40 in the Camaro. He stopped suddenly, at the sight of Steve Harrington's approaching form, cigarette almost falling from his mouth as the scream of '*Round and Round*' blared in the background.

What the fuck?

"What's a matter? Car broke down again, Harrington?" Billy asked, autopilot.

Steve didn't reply, marching over to Billy until they were inches apart, staring each other down, knowing exactly what was going on.

Billy exhaled the last of his cigarette, threw it down on the floor, slammed his foot down against it.

"You just come here to stare at me, huh, pretty boy?"

"Oh, shut up, Hargrove."

And that was the moment Steve's lips locked with Billy's, walking him back into the garage, hands on his face at first, then running through his hair. Billy was barely aware of the fact they crashed onto the top of the car he'd been working on, leaning against the bonnet, Billy underneath at first, before he finally flipped Steve over.

And just what the fuck is going on now?

In all honestly, Billy wasn't sure he even wanted to answer that question as he pressed his skin against Steve's, heard the other exhale shakily, and moved his hands up and down Harrington's body as he pushed him up hard against the hood of the car, sharp breaths in unison.

Right now, all Billy needed to know was that he hadn't been imagining it the whole time, *That this, right now, was real. And Steve felt it too.*

2nd May, 1992

"Hey! Lucy! You got some college kids asking after you! You want me to kick 'em out or what?"

Lucy looked up at the sound of Benicio's call, wandering out from her office and into the kitchen.

"College kids?" she asked.

"Yeah. Guy and a girl? Look around my age. Girl's skinny, dark haired. Guy's kinda tall, skinny too, shit, he's got the tallest hair I've ever seen!"

Lucy's heart skipped a beat.

"Did they say what their names were?" she asked.

Benicio paused then, a frown forming on his face. "I think they said their names were Steve and Nancy? But I'm not sure."

And it took everything in Lucy's power to stay upright then, her hands gripping the side of the frying station.

"Oh, shit..."

13. Going Back to Cali

2nd May, 1992

“You’ve got five minutes, and then you need to leave!”

The doors of the Diner’s exit flew open, and Lucy stormed out into the car park, she turned on her heel to face Steve and Nancy, arms crossed, brow furrowed.

“Max, look, we know you’re angry, but trust me when I say, this is *important...*” Nancy tried.

“Well shit, Nancy, it must be! After all, the pair of you have clearly put a hell of a lot of time into stalking me across the country, haven’t you?”

“Max...”

“And stop calling me *Max*, it’s Lucy now, OK? You think I want any ties back to my old life after everything that happened?!” Her face was scrunched up with the threat of tears, cheeks reddening and eyes wet. She turned her attention to the floor, and both Steve and Nancy found themselves momentarily incapable of a response.

“Why’d you run, huh?” Steve asked, after a long pause.

“Why did I run, Steve? You’re really asking me that?” She shook her head, pulling a cigarette out of her pocket and lighting it. “Shall we cut the pleasantries and get right to the point? I know you’re only here because of my brother.”

“Yeah, well, I suppose you guessed right.”

Lucy stared back at them in hesitation then, a shaky hand raising the cigarette back to her mouth.

“He’s not... I mean... he’s OK right?” There was a sharp note of fear in her voice, and it didn’t take a genius to understand what she was really asking.

“He’s alive, if that’s what you mean,” Steve replied, and Nancy could already sense the bite in his tone. “But he’s definitely not OK.”

Her eyes trailed back to the floor then, not looking up as she asked the next question. “So...what happened to him?”

“He went to prison, ten years for attempted murder. Shit, what did you think would happen after his star witness took off and disappeared, Max?”

“Stop calling me that.”

“Well it’s your name, isn’t it? Did you think changing your name and running away to California was going to erase everything that happened that night?!” Steve found himself spitting back with unprecedented venom.

“Steve, calm down,” Nancy muttered, a hand reaching out to grab his shoulder.

“Why should I, Nance?!” Steve snarled, pulling away from her. “I mean, shit, I suppose I was willing to let the fact she robbed me *and ran off into the sunset* slide at first. I thought, whatever, you know, she was freaked out, needed some time to think, she’d be back in a few days, a week tops! How fucking wrong was I?!” Steve turned his attention to Lucy then. “You know what, Billy might actually be *free* now. And that asshole, that *asshole* that terrorised your family all those years, *he* might actually be in jail! Did you ever consider how much influence you might have on that, Max?!”

“Steve, stop shouting at her! *You’re* being an asshole right now!” Nancy was raising her voice now too.

“Fuck you, Steve! You don’t understand a goddamn *thing* about my family!” Lucy snapped back, throwing her cigarette to the floor and storming back in the direction of the fire exit. “Swear to god, you come by here again, I’ll call the police!”

And Steve’s face was already buried in his hands, Lucy’s hands wrapped around the handle before Nancy finally caught up to her.

“Please, Max, I mean, *Lucy*, just hear us out? Just for a few minutes?

Steve's hurting, I know he didn't mean to shout at you like that," Nancy sighed. "It's just, Billy...he's not in a good way. He nearly... well... he nearly died last month."

Lucy's expression dropped then. "...What? What do you mean?"

"It's a long story. But we can tell you it, if you just give us the time to. Can you do that for us, please? Just give us some time to explain everything to you?"

Lucy exhaled deeply, glanced over to Steve briefly, before looking back to Nancy. Finally, she dug into the pockets of her uniform and pulled out her order notepad, scrawling something down before tearing it off and handing it to Nancy.

"This is my address. I get off at 6. Come by after 7:30 and we can talk," she took another glance in Steve's direction. "And keep him in check, OK?"

"Thanks, Lucy, you don't know how much this—"

But Nancy wasn't able to finish her sentence before the other woman had slammed the fire exit door shut in her face.

Nancy folded the note back and stuck it into the pocket of her jeans, heading back over to Steve, who was now sat down, cross legged in the sandy dirt of the parking lot, hands running through his hair and tears staining his cheeks.

She sat down in the dirt with him, arms reaching over his shoulders as she pulled him into a hug.

"She's gonna see us tonight Steve. Look, she gave me her address."

But Steve barely registered her words as he head rested against her neck.

"I wish I'd never got involved with that fucking family, Nance. That stupid guy, why did I have to pick *him*?" Steve muttered. "All he's ever done is hurt me. You know, I think I more or less loved him from the very start, but he couldn't love me back. Not really. And then, one day out of nowhere, he finally did. He turned round and

admitted it to everyone, and it was the best day ever. Now less than two years later he's gone again. And now we're not even together, and he's still breaking my fucking heart. I can't take it anymore, Nance."

Nancy held him as he burst into tears, and the more Steve allowed himself to sink into her touch, the more comforted he felt. Everything about Nancy was familiar. Her perfume, the feel of her arms around him, even the tickling sensation of her hair against the back of his neck as she leaned in to hug him. Over the past twenty-four hours, he'd been steadily battling a strange sense of nostalgia that had been building in him since they'd embarked on their trip to Cali.

"We're here to make this right, Steve," Nancy smiled as she pulled away from the hug.

"Well, maybe Billy and I were never right in the first place," Steve muttered, his gaze locking with Nancy's now. "Are you happy, Nance? I mean, are you *really* happy? Do you think you made the right decisions in life?"

And really, Steve wasn't even entirely sure what he was saying or why, but the desperation, the loneliness, and the hurt seemed to be speaking for him right now.

Nancy frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Shit, I don't know," Steve shook his head, running his hands through his hair. "I know I shouldn't be saying this, but, since Billy and I broke up, well...I...sometimes I think I made a mistake a long time ago. Sometimes I think, well, *you know*..."

"No, Steve, I *don't* know," Nancy raised her eyebrows.

"Well, shit, Nance, do I need to spell it out? Sometimes I just think everything would have worked out a hell of a lot better if, you know, me and *you* had just...stayed together."

The two stared at each other then in silence, before Nancy finally broke eye contact.

"I'm pregnant, Steve."

“Fuck!” Steve blurted. “Shit, you’re lying, right, Nance? I mean, what?” He frowned, bewildered as he looked over Nancy. He got up, taking a step back, hands on hips.

“I’m not lying, Steve,” Nancy sighed, getting up too. “I got the news a while ago but I didn’t think it was the right time to tell you. I’m pregnant. Three months.”

“Oh...” Steve muttered finally, finding himself consumed with a sudden, overwhelming sensation of jealousy. *John and Nancy, happily married soon-to-be parents vs Steve Harrington and his ex-jailbird lover. No contest there for Couple of the Year, was there?*

“Steve?” Nancy shook him back into reality with a hand to his arm. “I know you still love him.”

And despite everything, Steve was able to force himself to nod in agreement.

“I’m sorry, Nance,” he shook his head, drying his eyes, forcing a smile. “I mean, shit, congratulations!” He opened his arms for a much more cheerful embrace, and the two of them laughed as they did so. “I best be this kid’s godfather, you know!”

“You both will be,” Nancy smiled as she pulled Steve into a tight hug. “You *and* Billy.”

The glamorous side of Los Angeles had tapered off a couple miles back from Lucy’s neighbourhood. The apartment block she lived in looked like a rundown shithole from the outside, and the stairwell up to her door smelt of piss and booze. It was a ten minute walk from Steve and Nancy’s hotel but they drove there anyway.

Lucy opened the door to them just before 8pm, pulling them into the apartment as quickly as possible.

“You want a drink of something? Tea, coffee, scotch? I think there’s some Cola in the fridge...” she called from the kitchen.

"I'll just have some tea, if that's OK," Steve called back, at the same time as Nancy requested a cola 'with a straw' for herself and scotch for Steve.

Lucy returned with a scotch and cola, sitting down on the couch opposite the two of them, still dressed in her work uniform. Her hair was by now a tangled, unbrushed mess, nails noticeably bitten down to stubs. She looked like a nervous wreck, and judging by the state of the apartment, she had been for a while now.

"Thank you, Lucy," Nancy began, taking a sip of her drink. "It means a lot to us that you've invited us here."

"Yeah," Lucy muttered, absently, avoiding eye contact. "So, tell me about Billy. What happened to him?"

"He's alright, I suppose..." Nancy began.

"No, he isn't," Steve cut in.

"He's alright as he can be, given that he's been stuck in prison as long as he has been," Nancy cut in.

"You said he nearly died," Lucy remarked.

Nancy opened her mouth to speak, but Steve beat her to it.

"Drug overdose," he interjected, bluntly.

"Drugs?" Lucy replied, bewildered. "But...Billy was never interested into that sorta thing before prison..."

"*Before* prison, yeah," Steve muttered. "It changes people, Lucy. It *really* changes people. Pushes them to their limits. I think Billy was just doing anything he could to escape."

There was a brief silence then.

"I didn't want to leave him, you know, I just...I didn't feel like I had a choice..." Lucy muttered at last, her voice hitching all of a sudden.

"What do you mean?" Steve asked. "You had me. You had Nance and

John. Shit, if you'd stayed in Hawkins, pretty soon you'd have had the whole community there for you. What made you run? I just...I'm not mad at you for what you did, OK? I just need to know..."

Lucy nodded slowly, sniffed. "It's more complicated than you think it is, Steve."

"More complicated *how*? How complicated could it be? The guy beat the shit of Billy, he threatened *you*, and I'm assuming he threatened your mom too, that's why she left right? Do you have any idea how important that sort of testimony would be in Billy's case? Don't you want him to be free? Don't you wanna see Neil fucking Hargrove behind bars for good?"

Lucy swallowed, drew her head back. She was blinking back tears.

"Hey, Nancy, you think you could get me a drink too?"

Nancy stood up at once, sensing Lucy's increasingly fragile state. "What you want, sweetheart? A hot drink? Cold?"

"Scotch, straight," Lucy replied without hesitation. "Thanks."

Nancy disappeared into the kitchen, and Steve now found himself left face to face with Lucy, alone.

"Lucy, *what happened that night?*"

"Look, Steve, it's not...it's not that I never cared about Billy. I've always cared about Billy," Lucy began. "It's just that...I was scared. I was really, *really* fucking scared. And at the time, I guess, I thought it would be the best thing for everyone if I just left. I know you think I abandoned Billy, but honestly, I felt like I'd have been endangering him and everyone I cared about if I stayed. You think Neil Hargrove is an asshole? Well, you don't even know the half of it..."

Nancy returned with Lucy's drink, handing it to her before sitting down next to Steve. Lucy thanked her, before taking a long swig of it, setting it down on the coffee table before them. Steve noticed her hand was once again shaking.

"You know, when I left Hawkins that day and headed to Cali, I

thought I was gonna find my mom..." Lucy muttered. "She'd written her new address inside the front page of my school planner. That's why I'd headed back out to Cali after that night. But it had taken me weeks to find the place. And by then, she was already gone, no address, no number. At first, I'd hated her for it, abandoning me and all. But I know why she did it now. She didn't wanna hurt me, she was just trying to stop me from getting hurt. The thing is, I think she knew something that Billy and I didn't. And she was scared."

"She knew something?" Steve and Nancy asked in unison.

"Yeah," Lucy bit her lip, tears finally falling from her eyes. "I think, that's why she left. I mean, I don't know how she found it out, but... you know, I'm glad, in a way, that I can't find her, because...well..."

"Lucy, what was it?" Nancy asked.

Lucy was trembling now, hands shaking around the glass in her hand as she set it down, tears spilling from her eyes as she maintained a reluctantly straight face.

"Billy's mom," she breathed, shakily. "That night....that night that Billy was arrested? Well...just before he arrived...Neil, he told me that, Billy's mom's car accident...."

And she was choking up now, doubling in on herself. Both Steve and Nancy rose from their seats, moving to sit by either side of Lucy, hands over her shoulders.

"It's OK, sweetheart, you can tell us..." Nancy whispered.

"Billy...Billy's mom's car accident...it wasn't a fucking accident!" Lucy sniffed. "That night he threatened to hurt me, he was out of control. He didn't even seem to care what he was saying anymore. He told me, he was gonna do the same to *my* mom, that he did to *Billy's* mom. He said he was gonna kill her, like he did Tonya. He told me..."

And Lucy was caught in the middle of choking sobs now, barely able to get her words out.

"...he told me he'd hired someone to run Tonya off the road. She'd

tried to divorce him. And he wasn't gonna let that happen. He murdered her. And the worst part is, Billy has no idea."

14. Just The Two Of Us

Notes for the Chapter:

Apologies for the rather long delay in updating. I started a new job last month and have been so bloody tired I haven't been able to think straight for weeks. Anyway, hope you all enjoy! =] Songs included in this chapters are 'Just the Two of Us' by Bill Withers and 'Walking on Sunshine' by Katrina and the Waves. <3

August, 1988

*'I see the crystal raindrops fall, and the beauty of it all,
Is when the sun comes shining through...'*

"Tell me again where we're going, Bill?" Steve asked, becoming tired of Billy's cryptic instructions.

Billy opened his mouth to speak, but Steve beat him to it.

"Shut up and drive, Harrington?" Steve asked, mimicking Billy's voice.

*'Just the two of us, we can make it if we try
Just the two of us...'*

Billy shook his head, a brief smirk on his face as he lit his cigarette, but it was gone in an instant. He'd been quiet all morning, and for the first time since they'd reached California, Steve couldn't read him at all.

It was their last day in Cali now, and the ten-day escape had felt like a dream until this morning. They'd spent their time away driving around the hills, visiting landmarks and old hangouts from Billy's life before Hawkins --the dive bar that never took ID, the diner with a model replica of Jimmy Dean's death-car outside, the underneath of

the pier where they'd scratched their initials into one of the beams. They'd spent most nights either at the beach or a nearby bar, ending each night drunk and in each other's arms. Steve had really hoped for one last carefree day before a bittersweet road-trip back to Indiana, but Billy had been insistent on visiting this mysterious location on their last day almost as soon as they got to Cali. He'd tried to pry it out of Billy on several occasions but had been met with an 'It doesn't matter' or 'Quit prying' every time. He'd given up after the fifth attempt. Steve knew by now that trying to get anything out of Billy he didn't already want him to know was like drawing blood from a stone. But as they drew nearer and nearer to the mystery location, Steve's curiosity began to turn into anxiety.

"You've missed it!" Billy snapped suddenly, a sense of urgency in his voice then as he lurched in his seat, leaning back towards the rear-view. "Goddamnit, Harrington! Turn back!"

"Jesus, Billy, I will! Calm down will you?!"

*'And darling when the morning comes, and I see the morning sun
I want to be the one with you...'*

Steve reversed the car down the uphill road, and just as the smell of burning rubber became unbearable, Billy's hand reached over to the steering wheel, closing over Steve's as he muttered in an uncharacteristically weak tone 'Stop.'

Steve slammed on the brakes and looked followed Billy's glazed over gaze out through his window.

"What the hell, Billy?" Steve muttered. "*This* is where you wanted to go?"

Billy swallowed, nodding slowly. "Mmhm."

The both of them were now staring out at the gates of a cemetery, and as Steve looked back in Billy's direction then, he noticed his boyfriend's eyes brimming with tears.

"Shit, are you alright?"

"I'm fine, Harrington. Park up already, will you? We haven't got

long.”

They parked up by the edge of a side road, and Billy was out of the car before Steve had even managed to turn the engine off. He was practically running to keep up with him as Billy stormed ahead towards the cemetery gates, a sinking sensation in his stomach as he tried to keep up. Everything suddenly clicked into place in Steve’s mind then. He didn’t need Billy to tell them what they were doing right now, he already knew why they were here.

Billy marched on at the same speed for several minutes, and Steve tried his best to tag along behind him without attempting an embarrassing dad-run after him. The cemetery was huge, and at its hilltop location, with the sun blazing down upon its green grass and vibrant vegetation, it seemed quite beautiful. The smell in the air was sweet and floral, and the heat breathing down on their location was just right. He briefly found himself forgetting where they were.

Sort it out, Harrington, this isn’t a time to take in the scenic view. Steve told himself, watching Billy striding forward with purpose. He was closing in on a new-ish looking grave under a nearby willow, and within thirty seconds, he’d stopped before it. Steve felt his throat and mouth dry up at the realisation they’d reached their destination. He sped up his pace to catch up with Billy, finally reaching his side.

“Billy...” he began.

“She’s been gone six years to the day,” Billy muttered, reaching into the pockets of his jacket and pulling out a cigarette, lighting it. “Feels like a fucking lifetime ago.”

Steve said nothing, looked forward towards the marble headstone, eyes skimming across the plaque.

‘Tonya Marie Hargrove. 1940-1982. Beloved Mother.’

“Shit, Billy, your mom...she...I mean, you told me she moved to Canada...”

“She’s dead, Steve. Car accident. Happened just before we were gonna up and leave that asshole. Fucking cruel twist of fate, right?”

Billy laughed. But it was so hollow it sent a sharp chill down Steve's spine. He felt a lump in his throat, and all he wanted to do in that moment was hold Billy. But as usual, he could sense Billy's defensive guards coming up. It was there in his voice, his body language, the way he still managed to maintain that haunted smirk as he puffed on the end of his cigarette. *Billy Hargrove was not vulnerable.*

"*Beloved mother*," Billy laughed. "*Beloved mother*, you read that? Shit, Neil paid for the goddamn headstone and he didn't even think to put 'wife' on there."

"Why—"

"Why the fuck do you think?" Billy asked, blowing a thick line of smoke out into the air before turning to Steve. "He knew she wanted to leave. He fucking hated her."

"Fuck. Bill, I don't know what to say..."

"You don't need to say anything, Harrington," Billy muttered, shaking his head, eyes still locked on the grave as he spoke. And Steve noticed the tears falling from his eyes before Billy abruptly wiped them away with the sleeve of his free hand, taking a step closer to the headstone and kneeling down in front of it. He flicked his half-smoked cigarette to the side and placed a hand on the headstone.

"I'm sorry, Mom," Billy whispered, barely audible to Steve now in his crouched position. "I'm so...fucking...sorry..."

Billy's voice broke on his last few words, and Steve instinctively crouched down beside him, arms wrapping around him as they sat before Tonya's grave.

Billy was crying, but Steve knew it would be better to ignore it in this moment, acknowledging it with words would only make this more painful for him right now. He just held him, rocking him gently and stroking his hair for the longest time, before Billy finally looked to Steve with a childlike expression he'd never seen before, face stained with tears.

“Steve,” he whispered. “I’m ready to go back to Indiana.”

10th May 1992

‘Good morning, Hawkins, and what a wonderful day it is today! Record heat today, we’re expecting the hottest day in May recorded in over fifty years, and with temperatures set to skyrocket over the next few weeks, we’ve got plenty more to come!’

‘Walking on Sunshine’ blasted out of the stereo of the car as Hawkins FM’s upbeat morning DJ faded out, and Steve hears a groan from the passenger seat as he drove down the jagged side road.

“Not a fan, Lucy?” he asked, turning to the redhead beside him.

“You might as well stop calling me that now, Steve,” she sighed. “Seeing as my cover has well and truly blown, and all.”

Steve hesitated. “So...you’re Max again?”

“Well, yeah, I’m Max. I’m Max *fucking* Mayfield! I always will be! Apparently, no amount of time *or* distance can do a thing about that!”

Max had been on edge from the very minute the pair of them had got into the car that morning, and Steve supposed he couldn’t blame her. He’d dragged Max all the way back from California after all, and now she was facing the imminent fear of revealing previously undisclosed information to the police, testifying against her abusive former stepdad in court, and more immediately, visiting her brother in prison to inform him his mother’s death was in fact, not an accident at all, but his father’s doing.

“It’s going to be alright, Max. I promise, everything’s going to be alright.”

“Billy made a lot of promises he couldn’t keep too,” Max sighed, unwinding the window and staring out. “Jesus, he was right all along. Hawkins really does smell of shit.”

Another twenty minutes passed by, and finally, they reached the barbed wire fortress that was Hawkins Penitentiary. The two of them sat in the parked car in silence for several minutes, before Steve regained the ability of speech.

“Max, you don’t need to be scared. Billy will be glad to see you, I know that he...”

“Let’s just fucking do this, OK, Steve?” Max interjected, flipping her heart-shaped sunglasses over her eyes and climbing out of the car before Steve had a chance to protest.

And all Steve could do was watch as Max marched on towards the entrance of the prison, feeling an uneasy sense of déjà vu.

It was time to tell Billy the truth.

15. You Are My Sunshine

May 4th, 1992

“So do I get a hug or not?”

Billy stood at the table of the visiting room, it was the only thing separating himself from his step-sister as he stared back at her now. He ran a hand through his hair and laughed, tried his hardest to remain calm, to not give off any indication of his racing heart at the very sight of her after all these years.

“You want a *hug*?”

Max stood, arms folded, eyebrows knitting into a frown.

“Whatever, Max,” Billy shrugged, pulling his chair out. “Where’s my ex, anyway? I’m assuming he’s the one who brought you here.”

Max didn’t move to hug him. “Steve left his ID in his car. They won’t let him in without. He’ll be up in a minute or too. Consider me your entertainment until then.”

For some reason, Billy felt hollow then. *Why had he expected her to actually want to hug him?*

He made a move to sit down, but his disappointment was momentary. Within seconds Max had bridged the gap between the two of them and wrapped her arms around him tight, her head pressing into his chest. Billy bit his lip to silence the whimper.

It had been several weeks since his overdose, but his bones were still aching, and his body felt weak. He’d been fortunate in avoiding Stanford for the most part since he re-entered Gen Pop, and in the past few days he’d learnt his overdose had been a direct result of that. *Stanford isn’t going to associate with a drug fiend, Hargrove. Your time with us is over.* And they’d said it like it was a goddamn insult?! Billy had felt free, well, as much as he could whilst remaining locked up in this shithole. And maybe he’d have started to feel hopeful, if it wasn’t for the radio silence from Steve. Hadn’t he said he was going

to sort this shit? Wasn't he on his way to 'getting him out of here'? In the past week, Billy had called Steve's home number relentlessly. No answer. Multiple voice messages, and still, nothing. He's given up hope entirely. And now, out of the blue, here she was. His runaway sister. The girl he'd handed his freedom over for, in order protect her. Billy didn't know how to feel. Part of him wanted to revert back to his old ways, shout at her, blame her for disappearing, blame her for *everything*. But he'd fucking missed her too. He *actually* missed the little shit.

"Fuck, you smell like the real world," Billy sighed as they finally pulled away from each other and sat down.

"The *real* world? That has a smell?"

"I dunno," he shrugged. "More like an absence of a smell. You know, after a while you get so used to smell of ass in this place that you forget there is a whole world out there that doesn't smell *entirely* of it."

"You wishing for the gorgeous, manure filled air of Hawkins now, Billy?" Max raised her eyebrows.

Billy snorted, looking across the table at his step-sister and taking in just how much had changed about her since he'd been locked up. She looked so different. And that terrified him. What else had changed since he'd been locked up? The outside world was moving on, and he was just fucking, *what?* Sat decaying in this hellhole?

"So, how was Narnia?" he asked after a while.

"What?"

"Narnia, how was it? I figured that must have been where you were all this time," Billy continued, his sudden realisation of time wasted beginning to ignite that classic Hargrove curse inside of him, that fucking destructive *rage* he wished to god would leave him be. "Or the Upside Down. Same difference, really."

He was drumming his fingers on the table now, a distant look on his face, lips forming into a smirk.

“Billy, you know why I had to leave...”

He ignored her. “Hey, did Susan ever read those Narnia books to you when you were a kid, Maxine? Mommy dearest, rest her soul, they were her favourites. Shit, she read them to me practically every goddamn night...”

“Billy—“

“Don’t you think it’s funny? Like, they’re actually kinda non-fiction when you think about it. The Upside Down being a real thing, and all. Fucked up Narnia, am I right?! The real world equivalent, anyway. The real world’s a piece of crap, isn’t it, after all? No happy endings, just a bunch of terrifying, fucked up shit...”

“Billy! You’re shouting!”

Max’s hand landed upon his drumming fingers, flattening them out against the table, squeezing his hand tight.

Billy fell silent, felt a familiar sense of overwhelming sadness building in his chest. He looked up at Max now.

“Why, Max?” he muttered, voice suddenly fragile and quiet as he averted his gaze to their hands. “Why does he get to get away with this? He got away with what he did to you, to me, to both of our mothers...he’s an asshole. *He’s* the one who should be behind bars.”

“And he will be,” Max whispered, squeezing Billy’s hand tighter.

“What?” Billy looked up. “*How?* We’ve got no fuckin’ proof of what he did to you that night. Or what he did to me and your mom over those years.”

“No, you’re right,” Max nodded, her voice soft. “But Billy...you *don’t* know the reason I ran...”

But Billy was looking ahead from Max now, over to the corner of the visitor’s entrance as Steve made his way across to the two of them. Max turned around, watched Steve approach, a pile of nerves as he sat down beside her to face Billy.

Billy's face was a mess of hurt and confusion, and before Max even had the chance to open her mouth, Steve launched right in.

"Look, Billy, I know it must be hard to hear what happened to your mom, but trust me when I say this, we're gonna put that bastard behind bars for the rest of his goddamn life for what he did to her..."

Max glared at Steve, and his face flushed red immediately. And perhaps Billy would have found it endearing, if it wasn't for the burning question---

"And just what the *fuck did* happen to my mom?!"

The two stared back at him, seemingly petrified.

"What is this, a fuckin' statue contest? Someone speak, goddamnit!" Billy spat, although the venom in his tone seemed eclipsed by a childlike fear.

Max was the one to finally attempt to deliver the blow.

"Billy, the night you were arrested, Neil told me something. He... well...I don't know if he was trying to scare me, or spite me, I don't... I just don't..."

"Spit it out Maxine!" Billy snarled, and there was something in his demand that reminded her of a much crueller Billy. *Maaaax. Say it. SAY IT!!*

Tears welled in her eyes.

"Look, Billy, before I tell you this---"

"Neil killed your mom, Billy," Steve cut in. "It wasn't an accident. He hired someone to run her off the road."

And suddenly, Billy's world was silent. His heart was racing, and his body felt as if he'd been dunked into an ice bath. Steve was still talking, but Billy's vision was blurring, he couldn't hear him. He was vaguely aware Max was crying. It was perhaps the last thing he realised before he zoned out entirely.

Suddenly, all he could see was Tonya. He was back in 1982, it was

the day before she died, before she left him with that monster. They'd taken a ride up to the new house by the lake in Michigan. The new house she'd rented out of stolen savings from Neil, the house she'd been secretly furnishing for months, getting ready to whisk the pair of them away to. It had been a bright, sunny day, music playing on the radio, and her smile, it had been the first time he'd seen her smile in a long time.

'Give it another week, Kid, and we'll be here...'

"Billy? Billy, can you hear me?!"

Max's voice, Steve's hand over his. He slowly felt himself tapping back into the present.

"He's alright, he's alright..."

Someone was rubbing his shoulder, and Billy realised his face was now wet with tears.

"Billy, can you hear me?" Max repeated.

Billy finally focused his vision, looking back at the pair of them now feeling demolished, helpless.

"Yeah, Max," he muttered. "I can hear you."

"People will finally see that bastard for who he really was. We're gonna get you out of here as soon as we get that asshole put away for good, you hear me, Bill?" Steve squeezed his shoulder tightly.

But Billy felt blank. He nodded, feeling the years of pent up rage build up at the final realisation of what had caused it all in the first place.

He swallowed.

"Yeah," he repeated, voice vacant and broken. "I hear you."

Michigan, 1982

*'You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,
You make me happy when skies are gray...'*

Billy and Tonya sat, parked up beside the lakeside, engine on, radio humming quietly in the background. The sun was glistening on the water, reflected on the windscreen.

"This is going to be our new start, sweetheart," Tonya said, nodding almost as if to assure herself as much as him.

"Yeah, I know," Billy nodded too, gaze still pulled to the floor, unwilling to look up. His mother may have been wearing shades to mask her black eye, but her bust lip was still in plain sight.

*'I'll always love you and make you happy
If you will only say the same...'*

"Billy, look at me," Tonya said softly, reaching over and gently lifting his chin until he was facing her. "You want a smoke?"

Billy said nothing, watching as she dug into her purse, pulling out a cigarette and handing it to him. She handed him a lighter, and watched as he lit it.

"I love you, Billy," she smiled, rubbing his shoulder briefly before turning back to look at the lake ahead.

"I love you too, Mom."

*'You'll never know dear, how much I love you
Please don't take my sunshine away...'*

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you so much to everyone who follows and comments on my fic, you're all amazing! <3

Song featured in this chapter is 'You are my Sunshine' by Jimmie Davis although I had the Johnny Cash version in mind =]

16. Waiting for an Alibi

Summary for the Chapter:

Thanks for your patience loyal readers! This is the chapter I'd promised for a long time which expands on that 'Billy covered in blood and Upside Down gloop' post from Tumblr I made about 1000 years ago. I hope you enjoy! Song featured and chapter title is 'Waiting for an Alibi' by Thin Lizzy :)

Summer, 1985

The humid night's air spewed through into the windows of Steve's Beamer as he and Billy sped on through the country road leading up to Hawkins.

"Look, all I'm saying is, it doesn't make any sense, OK? It would be impossible to get back up after being hit with a goddamn metal chair *and* being body slammed twice in one round. Like, don't get me wrong, I know Face Wrecker had the upper hand, but..."

Steve was finding it hard to focus on Billy's rant. Not only had they just spent the entire day together for the first time, they'd spent it at a fucking wrestling match in Indianapolis. Steve had no interest in wrestling whatsoever, but he'd been willing to entertain Billy's interest, at least for the first twenty minutes or so. An hour in to watching burly macho types smash each other's faces in, however, Steve had wanted to sneak out of the nearest exit and leave. But he hadn't wanted to leave Billy, who seemed so inexplicably into it that it was actually kinda endearing, watching him jump out of his seat, shouting and cheering, *smiling. Shit, if only Billy realised how fucking beautiful he looked when he did that.*

"Are you even listening to me, Harrington?"

"What?" Steve snapped back in to reality. "Yeah...yeah, I'm listening...face wrecking dude, what an asshole, right?"

"You're not listening."

“Billy, I am listening, Jesus...”

“You know what, Steve? I put up with all your pussy jock shit just fine.”

Steve paused. “My...*pussy...jock shit?*”

Billy shrugged his shoulders and crossing his arms. He was hunched into the corner of the passenger seat now, denim jacket bunched up and misshapen from the tightly folded arms, face expressionless and lips slightly pursed, clearly trying to hide how hurt he was. And perhaps Steve would have laughed at just how fucking petulant his boyfriend looked right now, if it wasn't for how guilty he felt.

“Look, Billy, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to seem...you know, disinterested or anything. I've just been feeling kinda distracted today, OK? I've got a lot on my plate right now.”

“Oh, you've got a lot on your plate, do you? Like *what*, Harrington? Your fuckin' hair not go perfect today? Your daddy forget to put in your grand-a-week pocket money today, huh?” Billy raised his eyebrows, eyes fixed on the road as he laughed that shrill, sarcastic laugh he seemed to reserve for moments just like this.

“Goddamnit, why do you wanna ruin this, Billy?” Steve muttered, watching out of the corner of his eye as Billy lit up a cigarette, neglecting to roll the window down in the process. Which was deliberate. Of course it was.

“You know what, Harrington? Don't worry about me ruining any more of your days,” Billy muttered. “In fact...”

And that was the precise moment Steve slammed on the brakes, the Beamer coming to a screeching stop in the middle of the deserted road. An all too familiar, otherworldly screech echoing across the surrounding area, filling Steve with a sense of imminent dread.

And Billy was *still fucking talking*.

“Hey, Billy?” Steve muttered. “Shut the fuck up for once, will you?”

The sound echoed out again, louder this time. And to Steve's surprise,

Billy was now silent, stubbing his cigarette out in the car's ashtray and staring out of the dashboard alongside him.

"Jesus, what the fuck was that?"

But Steve didn't have time to answer. Within seconds, the whole car shook with the crushing weight of something hurling itself on top of the roof of the Beamer. The vehicle rocked from side to side, before the weight gave way, and the animalistic shrieking continued, the sound of heavy footed scurrying now coming from the side of the car.

"Oh, shit, this can't be happening again..." Steve muttered.

Billy looked to Steve, face stricken with a mixture of confusion and panic.

"I'll ask you again, Harrington, what...the *fuck* is going on?"

Another ominous squeal rang out from the nearby shrubbery and Billy flinched, immediately tried to play it down.

"Demo-Dogs," Steve muttered. "They're back."

"Demo-fucking-whats?!"

"Shit, Billy, look out!"

It was the last thing Steve uttered before the aforementioned Demo-Fucking-What hurled itself at the passenger side of the car. Glass shattered everywhere, and the both of them were screaming. Suddenly, everything became a blur. Steve watched as the creature launched itself through the smashed glass, clawing and snapping at Billy, Billy opening the car door to pry the thing off himself, blood splattering the side of the dashboard, and Billy being pulled straight out of the Beamer and on to the road.

*'Valentino's got a bookie shop
And what he takes he gives for what he's got...'*

Steve came to his senses then, jumping out of the car and darting across to the trunk, yanking it up and rooting around in the dark until his hands clasped over the retired nail bat, wrapped in a

dishtowel underneath a pile of unused training weights.

“You’re not ruining my date, you mutant assholes!” Steve screamed, putting the inward cringe at the line on pause in order to run over to Billy’s aid, swinging at the Demo-Dog now crouching over Billy and knocking it halfway across the road.

Billy jumped up in an instant, face covered in scratches, clothes torn to shreds.

“Billy, are you alright?” Steve breathed, bat still raised above his head.

*‘It’s not that he don’t tell the truth
Or even that he misspent his youth...’*

“Shit,” Billy brushed himself off, checked himself up and down before his eyes set on the nail bat. “The fuck is this, Steve? Some sorta fucked up prank? You still sore about what happened last year?”

He was angry, but Steve could see it in his eyes. He was scared. He knew this wasn’t a prank.

“Keep your voice down, OK? There might be more than one,” Steve whispered.

“More than one of *what*, exactly?! What the hell was that thing?!” Billy demanded, at full volume.

“Shut up, Billy! For once in your life will you just...OH, FUCK...”

Another blood-curdling squeal, and within seconds, Steve felt the sting of claws tearing through the back of his jacket, bringing him down, nail bat clattering to the floor.

“Billy, *run!*” Steve pleaded, looking past Billy’s legs to see the approaching silhouettes of Demo-Dogs crawling from the nearby shrubbery on either side. He realised now, there was nothing he could do to save himself. He was done for, heart pounding in his chest, and tears slipping from his eyes. He squeezed them shut, hoping it would at least be quick.

“Hey, Cujo! Get off my fuckin’ boyfriend!”

The claws in Steve’s back were ripped away in an instant, then. And Steve looked up to see Billy stood above him, nailbat in hand. He held out his hand, pulling Steve up and thrusting a crowbar into his hand.

Steve stared at Billy in momentary disbelief. “Billy, why didn’t you...”

“It was the best I could find in your trunk, OK?” Billy shrugged. He didn’t get it. “Now let’s wreck these fuckers!”

‘Against all the odds he smokes another cigarette, Says it helps him to forget he’s a nervous wreck...’

They were side by side now, weapons raised, ready for the onslaught of all the horrors the Upside Down had to offer them. Within seconds they were swinging, smashing and bashing everything in sight as the Demo-Dogs launched themselves at the pair of them in every direction. Several dogs down, Steve looked over in Billy’s direction, blood splattered all over his face, and could have sworn he saw a look of genuine glee on the guy’s face as he smashed a Demo-Dog into the shrubs like a baseball.

“You’re *enjoying* this?!” Steve asked through exhausted breaths.

“OH YEAH! That’s how you fuckin’ do it, Harrington!” Billy screamed, whacking another on-coming dog across the road, spraying a mixture of blood and Upside Down gloop all over both himself and the hood of Steve’s car.

Nevermind.

‘Waiting for an alibi, waiting just to catch your eye...’

Steve finally retired the crowbar ten minutes later, staggering to the trunk and hurling it in. He looked over to Billy as he closed the trunk, now leaning against on the hood of the Beamer in his torn up and blood smeared denim jacket, so immersed in blood and Upside Down gloop his entire face was red and dripping with gore. And of course, there was a fucking cigarette burning in his hand, a quietly satisfied

expression on his face as he exhaled smoke out into the night air.

Billy sensed Steve's gaze, pulling himself away from the hood and turning to face Steve.

"You're full of surprises, ain't ya Harrington?" Billy grinned, licking his lips. "Jesus, I had you down as the vanilla sort when it came to first dates."

"Look, Billy, there's a lot I need to tell you..."

"I'll bet. How about we grab something to eat? You can tell me all about it."

Billy flicked his cigarette onto the ground before pulling the passenger door of the Beamer open and climbing in.

And for what seemed like an eternity, Steve stood, staring out into the distance in complete bewilderment, before the sudden honking of the horn rang out through the country lane.

"Hurry up, will ya? I'm starving!"

May 4th, 1992

"Listen, Steve, I'm telling you, the original is always gonna be the best!"

"No way, Max. Chocolate poptarts are the *only* poptarts in my house."

"Well, you know, since I'm gonna be *staying* at your house and all, I guess we'll have to sign a treaty. I'm getting strawberry poptarts."

Steve pulled up outside the convenience store and turned the engine off. He looked to Max.

"Let's make this quick, OK? I hate this place. It's full of idiots at this time."

“One more won’t hurt then, will it Steve?” Max grinned, grabbing her bag and stepping out of the car.

Despite their uncomfortable visit with Billy earlier that day, Max felt in high spirits. For the first time in a very long while, she found herself feeling a sense of hope. The visit with Billy had been cathartic in a way, and although she’d felt an unpleasant sense of guilt seeing Billy in the situation he was in, her mind was now focused more than ever on getting him out, and finally ridding the both of them from the looming, miserable presence of Neil.

“I’m gonna go look at the frozen aisle, OK? Don’t go roaming around every single aisle and disappearing on me. Just get your shitty poptarts and come right back, you hear?” Steve said, smirk on his face as they entered the store.

“I’m not Billy, you know, Steve,” Max sighed. “My attention span’s still kinda intact.”

Max left Steve with the cart, finding it all too easy to remember the exact aisle she needed. Before all this shit, Max and Billy had labelled this aisle the ‘tooth decay section’. And sure enough, nothing had changed. She made her way down the aisle, remembering happier times. As things had got better between Billy and herself, they’d made a habit of driving up here and filling their cart full of candy in preparation for a movie night. Max’s go-to had been Jolly Ranchers, while Billy had preferred Skittles. On payday, they’d line the inner pockets of their jackets with whatever they’d bought, and head to the local multiplex to catch a movie there. It had been short-lived, but it’d stuck in Max’s memory ever since she left Hawkins.

After a couple minutes searching, she reached the poptarts, grabbing a couple boxes of them off the shelves and turning round in the direction of the frozen aisle.

And then she stopped, grip on the boxes loosening, dropping them to the floor, her mouth hanging open in horror. She could feel herself shaking as she instinctively began to back away.

“Hello, Maxine.”

And there he was. Neil Hargrove, stood several feet away, snarling back at her. He'd aged, moustache and hair now flecked with grey, extra lines under the eyes. But the most striking difference about her ex-stepfather was the bitterness in his eyes. There was something almost inhuman about the man now.

"I gotta say, I'm surprised to see you here after all this time," Neil snarled, taking a step further towards her. "Where you been hiding out all these years, huh?"

Max wanted to tell him just how much she hated him, how the very thought of him made her skin crawl. But more than anything, she wanted to scream, to shout at him for what he'd done to her brother and his mother. She wanted to know *why*, and *how*. *How could you do this to your own fucking son?*

But her fear overrode it all. She ran. Out of the aisle, and out of the building. She ran until she reached Steve's car, finding herself crouching down on the asphalt behind it, her whole body shaking with fear, rage, and guilt. She raked her fingers through her hair, closed her eyes, and allowed the tears to fall.

It took Steve twenty minutes to find her.

"Max? Shit, are you alright? I've been looking everywhere for you. I thought you were just getting..."

"He was there, Steve..." Max muttered. "That asshole spoke to me..."

"Who?" Steve asked, crouching down to her level. "Max, what happened in there?"

"Neil fucking Hargrove," she sobbed. "He was in there!"

"Hey, hey, Max, come on, it's alright..."

"No, Steve! It's not alright! Nothing about this fucked up situation is alright! Why the hell is that bastard allowed to walk free after what he's done?! Whilst Billy...poor fucking Billy...he..."

But she couldn't finish her sentence, breaking down into tears as

Steve pulled her into his arms and held her tight.

“I want to go to the police station today,” Max muttered after a while, pulling herself away from Steve and looking up at him. “I want to make sure that bastard is off the streets for good.”

Steve nodded, standing, holding his hand up to Max.

“Come on, Max. We’ll make this right together.”

17. Scar Tissue

Summary for the Chapter:

Thank you to all of you who have stuck with this highly erratically updated story, and I hope you enjoy the recent update. Comments/Feedback will be greatly appreciated even more so than usual as I've been out of writing for about a month now! :)

May 14th, 1992

“You’re in deep shit, Miller. But I’m sure you know that already.”

Lane Robinson was the top investigator for the LAPD, and for good reason. He didn’t just interrogate, he manipulated his perps until they were willing to tell him *everything*. By the end of most of his interrogations, he’d not only have enough evidence to build an entire case three times over, he’d probably know the entire childhood backstory and the mother’s maiden name of whatever poor fuck was unfortunate enough to be sitting opposite him.

And former hit-man and inmate, Rick Miller, knew this. As did anyone in this place.

“Three years, you’ve done so far, that right, Miller?” Robinson asked, taking a seat and setting down the paperwork on the table before him. “Must have felt like an eternity, no? Shit,” he laughed, shook his head as he looked over the paperwork. “I can’t imagine how hard the next twenty-seven will be for you. Must be hard, living here, pining for the luxurious life you once had. I can imagine the life of a hitman would’a paid pretty well, right? You must miss the outside every day.”

“Eh, probably the same for you, I imagine, Robinson,” Miller shrugged. “Must be pretty depressing knowing you’re gonna spend the rest of your life working this shitty job, right?”

“You’re pretty quick, aren’t you?” Robinson laughed, slamming down a set of photographs in front of Miller. “You think you’ll be able to

keep that wit up when you're lying on a gurney with a needle in your arm?"

Miller's smile faded then, his gaze drawing to the photographs presented to him on the table. A car in a ditch, the front portion entirely destroyed. A second photo – the dented sign post from a highway, presumably where the car made impact. And a final photo, a headshot of a woman, big blonde, curly hair and a shit-ton of make-up, obviously clipped from a family photo.

He remembered the scene, and the face, immediately.

"Hawkins police in Indiana contacted us last week, got a suspect in custody, and he's named you, would you believe? A one... *Neil Hargrove*, ring any bells? He certainly seems to remember you. Pointed the finger right at you, in fact..."

Miller was silent then, staring at the photos, reaching out and picking up the picture of the female.

"And what's it to you if I do?" he asked, eyebrows raised.

"Well, it might mean your sentence doesn't result in a death penalty upgrade, for one," Robinson informed him, as he lit up a cigarette. "And perhaps, if you're willing to co-operate with us, tell us what we want to know, maybe we can get you out of this shithole sooner than expected? It can't be nice in Super-Max, having to eat, shower and shit in front of a set of psychos. You're just a businessman at the end of the day, aren't you?"

Miller snorted. "And how soon are we talking?"

"We've got an offer," Robinson exhaled a plume of smoke. "Ten more years, and you're out. That sound appealing to you? Seventeen years off your sentence. All we need from you, is a confession, and details of your contact with Neil Hargrove, and his...what would you say? His *contract*, he signed with you to off Tonya Hargrove..."

Miller laughed.

"Kinda sounds like an offer I can't refuse there, doesn't it, Robinson?" he threw the picture across the table. "You got another smoke for

me?”

May 17th, 1992

Over the past few days, there had been an *Atmosphere* in the prison. And Billy really didn't know how else to describe it, but it was beginning to hinder his capacity to sleep and eat.

Stanford's drones had been paying extra attention to him, their glances lingering in the halls, during rec time, and in the canteen. He hadn't so much as dared to glance in Stanford's direction during this time, but no matter where he was, Billy had felt Stanford's eyes upon him. Despite the relays from Stanford's cronies that business between them was finished, an overwhelming amount of evidence told him that it was not.

It was around noon when Billy was doing his cleaning rounds through the halls. It was rec hour and a large portion of the prison were out of their cells, wandering through the halls freely. Billy had barely interacted with anyone since returning from Medical, and his nerves were on fire with paranoia after the few brief, unspoken interactions he'd had over the past few days with the Stanford crowd. He opened the door to the cleaning closet, having finally finished his mopping shift, and shoved the bucket of filthy water to the side, moving further into the tiny room to prop the mop up against the back wall.

It was then that he heard the door creak, closing behind him.

He was not alone.

Billy paused, his back to the presence behind him. He swallowed, feeling the metallic taste of fear rise in his throat, willing himself to stop shaking. He did not want to turn around.

And just as he made the move to reluctantly do so, he felt a hand against the back of his neck, a foot shoving into the back of his legs, and suddenly, he was on his knees, a hand forcing his head into the disgusting, murky water of the mop bucket, holding it under. Billy

gagged, taking an involuntary breath, tasting the acidic taste of the water before being yanked back up by his hair. He coughed and spluttered, feeling the hand let go of him as he scrambled to his feet, still coughing and choking as he tried to make sense of who he was looking as he turned to face his attackers.

“Finished with you domestic duties, Hargrove?” One of Stanford’s haggard, toothless cronies snarled as their eyes met. There was three of them, one blocking the door, the other two stood at either sides, shivs in hand. “You really seem to like sucking shit up, don’t you? Bit of a brown-noser for the guards these days, aren’t ya?”

“What the fuck are you talking about, asshole?” Billy coughed, wiping his face and pushing his drenched locks from his eyes. He tried his hardest to emit the fear building inside him from his words. But he was still backing up further and further into the shelves behind him.

Stanford’s two shiv-wielding cronies took a step forward, and before Billy could act, one had grabbed a fistful of his soaked hair, tilting his head back and pressing him hard against the shelves, shiv positioned at a right angle above his forehead.

“Stanford told us you’re a *snitch*,” the toothless cronie snarled, pressing an elbow against Billy’s throat now, faces inches apart. “He wanted us to let everyone in this place know that.”

“Why the fuck does he think that?” Billy’s choked response was hindered by the constriction on his windpipe, his eyes welling with tears from the combination of physical pressure and tears. “I’m no fucking snitch.”

“Seems awfully convenient for you to have asked to join the gang and then disappear off to Med like you did for so long, don’t it, Hargrove?” countered the other, tattoo laden drone, who was now pulling his arm back with such force Billy was pretty sure he’d break it if he applied any more pressure. “Hey, Briggs, you know what? I think we should do it on his face, not the arm. Then *no one* would forget what he’d done...”

Tattooed crone reached out, tried to grab hold of the other’s hold of

the shiv against Billy's forehead.

"Right across here..."

He pressed down, and Billy felt a slight pinch, and the cool, trickling sensation of blood against his forehead.

"No," Toothless snarled, snatching back the shiv. "Stanford said to do it on his arm, so that's where we're doing it."

"Fine. Fuck you, spoilt sport," the other muttered, grabbing hold of Billy left arm and yanking it out before him, pulling the sleeve of his prison overalls up.

And Billy's heart was racing now, the pressure on his throat increasing, and his fear mounting to an unbearable level.

"Please," he choked, despite himself, feeling tears burning in his eyes, finally escaping, and throwing freely down is face. "Please don't, *fuck*, I haven't...I haven't done anything..."

This was a familiar feeling. A horrible, unwanted sensation he'd hoped would have stopped the minute he left his father's lair. *He was terrified.*

"Shut the fuck up, Hargrove!" Tattooed cronies snarled, looking to Toothless now as he positioned the shiv over Billy's exposed forearm. "Shit, did Stanford want it in capitals or not?"

"For fuck's sake, who cares?! Just do it, already!" Toothless snapped.

"Please...you don't have to...please just fucking don't..." Billy begged, to no avail, beginning to sob indignantly as he felt the point of the shiv make contact with the flesh of his arm, stifling a scream as it dragged across his skin.

He looked up, his mind a storm of distress as he felt the blade dragging across his skin, wished to God he had looked around before entering the closet alone.

"Yeah, that's it. Make sure it's clear too," Toothless demanded, arm still pinning Billy to the wall. "S-N-I-T-C-H..."

Another hellish thirty seconds passed, and then, just as Billy felt as if he might pass out from the pain, the door to the cleaning closet burst open.

Billy was, by this point, in a complete daze. The pressure on his neck was released, offending shiv dropped to the floor, and finally, he was released from the cronies' grip.

He blinked, seeing a guard haul the three cronies from the room.

"Take these three to Seg immediately," he heard a guard order.

And in the brief moment before he himself was pulled out of the cleaning room, Billy was able to take a brief look at the damage that had been inflicted on his arm. They hadn't quite managed to finish the N, but the S was very much there, a deep and what he imagined to be an everlasting scar.

He realised he was still sobbing as he was finally pulled out of the closet, blood pouring from his arm. And that was the very last thing he remembered before passing out.

"At least they didn't get to finish it, hey?" the hapless doctor tried as he finished bandaging up Billy's arm. "Perhaps it'll add to your uh... *prison street cred*, having something like that on your arm?"

The doctor laughed at his own joked, nudging Billy on the shoulder. Billy continued to stare at the floor, eyes bloodshot by now with tears. He had nothing to say.

The door swung open, and it was the first time that Billy had looked up since entering the Emergency room.

A flustered looking man in an ill fitting suit met his gaze. And perhaps under different circumstances, Billy would have rolled his eyes. It was his lawyer.

"Mr Hargrove, how are you? Not great, I imagine? I've just been informed of your recent...uh...mishap..."

Billy held his gaze, said nothing.

“Well, then, yes...I uh...” Billy’s lawyer cleared his throat, awkwardly re-arranging his blazer before reaching into his briefcase to retrieve a set of papers. “Hopefully today, I can bring you some good news. I have just received word that your sister...I uh...I mean, that is, your *step sister*, Miss Maxine Mayfield, has recently made a statement in aid of your appeal...”

And it was then that Billy allowed the suspicious frown to fade from his expression, feeling his heart flutter in expectation.

“She did?”

*Shit, she really **does** care about me, even after everything I’ve done...*

“Yes, in fact, as a result of her statement, Hawkins Police have been able to officially detain your father, and have, in fact, been able to extract a confession out of him. Seems he’s given evidence towards the suspected hit-man that killed...” the lawyer paused then, readjusted his glasses and once again cleared his throat. “...the hit person that *may* have killed your mother.”

Billy’s mind was, by now, a whirlwind of emotions. He should be happy. *Surely he should be happy to hear this.* It could mean so much. It could mean Neil finally paying for what he’d done. It could mean himself having his sentence reduced, perhaps even having a re-sentencing to self-defence, maybe even an *early release*.

But for the most part, all he could feel was anger. Anger at the confirmation that yes, Neil really had taken his mother from him. It was no longer just a suspicion in the back of his mind

It was the truth.

Notes for the Chapter:

Yeah, I absolutely took influence from Piper's mutilation scene, in case you were wondering... =p

18. Ode to My Family

June 18th, 1992

*'He was the one, made me what I am today
It's up to me now, my daddy has gone away...*

Max stood in front of the mirror, the image before her seeming entirely alien. She'd never seen herself in formal wear. Not as an adult, at least. There'd never been any cause for it. The shoulder pads of the itchy nylon blazer rubbed against her skin, and the rigid waistband of her skirt constricted her breathing somewhat as it pushed up under her ribcage. She wished her mom had been there last week to help her pick out a suitable outfit for her court date. *Shit*, there'd been a hell of a lot of things she'd wished Susan had been there for over the past few years. She gave herself one last glance over in the mirror, and saw nothing but a terrified kid in a suit staring back at her. Max had always imagined herself at this age to be so grown up, *so together*, that nothing from her past could have ever come back to haunt her. *How fucking wrong she'd been.*

*'My daddy's hand it grewed, slow to the lickin
Sonny boy, grow to whip him!
If you see my dad, tell him my brothers all gone mad...'*

"Steve?" Max called, prying herself from the mirror and turning the radio off. "You ready yet?"

The past few weeks had been blissful compared to the usual bullshit for Billy. Not only had Stanford's cronies been locked up in Seg after his attack, Stanford himself had been hauled out of Gen Pop since the incident. But despite Steve and Max's reassurances during their visits, Billy had honestly not expected anything to come from Neil's arrest and the evidence against him. Until he was given the court date. *June 18th*. The date had rattled around his brain for weeks after. What would he say? And what would he have to re-live? But of course, the biggest fear lurking in the back of his mind was the thought of having to see the man again, having to look into the eyes of the asshole

who'd put him here, caused him so much pain...

He wasn't ready when the date was handed to him. And as he finally remembered how to pull the knot in his court-issued tie, Billy realised he wasn't ready now.

"You ready, Hargrove?" A guard called impatiently from the hall of the interviewing room in which Billy had changed into a set of standard issue court clothes that didn't quite fit him.

Billy left the room, allowed himself to be cuffed and lead out of the halls and onto the prison's transport bus. And it wasn't until they were on the road that his heart began to flutter with nerves.

Steve could tell that Max was nervous. She'd been pulling at the hem of her skirt, readjusting her wrist-watch and tucking and then untucking her hair behind her ear the entire journey. And as they drove closer to the court house, Max had begun tying her hair up, putting it back down, checking her face in the mirror, brows furrowed and eyes wide. Steve felt as if the slightest little inconvenience would be the undoing of her today, and so he'd kept his own insecurities to himself. He didn't tell Max about his most recent visit with Billy, about the fresh scar on Billy's arm he only caught the briefest glimpse of before Billy pulled the sleeve of his uniform down defensively, a look of shame spread across his face. And he didn't tell Max of the visit before, in which he had pushed a haul of prison confectionary across the table towards Billy and practically begged him to eat, to no avail.

As the two drove on in silence, steadily approaching the court house, it was clear Max didn't need to know any more than she already did right now.

The day in court would likely traumatise her enough.

The first thing Steve noticed as Billy entered the court room was how thin and tired he looked. The bags under his eyes had taken on a

purplish hue, and his cheekbones jutted out of his face in such a fashion that Steve felt a shiver down his spine as he looked at him, wishing he could just gather him in his arms and kiss his hollow cheeks, make everything OK. It was clear the impending trial had taken more of a toll on Billy than Steve could have ever imagined. And he couldn't bare it. Neither could Max, her hand reaching for Steve's at the sight of her brother, as he was lead, hands cuffed, to the witness stand.

Neil Hargrove sat seething in the defendant stand, eyes poised, laser-guided target on his son. And as Steve drew his attention away from the fucking asshole that had caused it all, he caught sight of Billy's trembling figure as he sat before the microphone, eyes darting in any and every direction but the defendant stand. Steve knew Billy well enough by now to know when he was *absolutely fucking terrified*. In fact, he'd only seen such an expression across Billy's face once before, that awful night in the woods many years ago, after having pulled a Demodog from Steve, fearing the very, *very* worst.

"Mr Hargrove," Billy's lawyer was now addressing him. "Is it true that, on the night of August 29th, 1989, you attacked the defendant, Mr Neil Hargrove, with a baseball bat at your family home?"

Billy didn't respond straight away, and even from across the courtroom Steve could see the tears welling up in his eyes, the memories of that fucked up night already overwhelming him.

Billy swallowed, re-adjusted his hair, and looked on in the most neutral direction possible before taking a breath.

Goddamnit, Bill, why can't you look at me?

"Yes," Billy responded for what felt like the hundredth time.

Question after question after fucking question, and all the while Billy had made sure to avoid eye contact with anyone who would provoke any sort of emotional reaction. To the left, he was painfully aware of Steve and Maxine's presence. And to the right, he could practically sense Neil's murderous rage as he listed off time after time his father

had physically and emotionally assaulted him, at his lawyer's prompt.

"One last question, Mr Hargrove, and this is very important," his lawyer asked then, turning away from the court to directly face Billy. "Do have reasonable suspicion that your father may have had motive to murder your mother?"

And Billy realised he was hesitating, a resistance in the form of a lump in his throat rising up, choking out any words he had to offer.

He slipped into a brief moment of weakness, glancing across the courtroom, his eyes meeting both Steve's and Max's.

"Hey, kid, is your dad at home right now?"

And Billy knew already by the tone in the police officer's voice, the forced sympathetic expression from the pair of them that something was very, very wrong.

"Why?"

"We just gotta talk to him, kid."

"I have a name," Billy muttered.

"Of course, of course you do," the officer interjected. "What's your name, k—"

"Billy."

"Well, Billy, can you get your dad for us?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"He's out."

"Ah," the police officer hesitated, stalling, expression drawn back to his

colleague. “And um...when do you think he might be back, Billy?”

Billy shrugged. “Dunno. He’s out late most nights. At the garage or the bar, I guess. Why can’t you tell me?”

“We....uh...I can’t exactly...”

And sweat was already gathering on the officer’s forehead. “Look, Billy, do you have a contact number or relative who could...”

“It’s about my mom, right?” Billy cut him off, hands grasping the doorframe, gaze cutting into the man before him. And in that moment, he knew. He fucking knew. “She’s dead, isn’t she?”

A renewed surge of rage flooded Billy’s system then, as he recalled the harrowing memory of receiving the news of his mother’s death, hands gripping tight to the podium. He cleared his throat, re-collected his thoughts.

“Yes,” Billy leaned into the microphone. “I believe my father was responsible for the murder of my mother.”

An audible gasp washed over the courtroom, and if Billy hadn’t been so fixed now on his gaze towards the defendant’s stand, eyes locked onto Neil’s, perhaps he would have noticed the hands clasped around the mouths of the jurors, the enthralled fascination spread across the face of local gossips fortunate enough to have squirmed their way into the courthouse.

But all Billy could focus on now was Neil’s menacing gaze. It was a look that suggested Billy wouldn’t live long enough to finish his explanation. But for the first time in his life, Billy realised he was free to say whatever he wanted. For the first time in his life, Neil was powerless over him.

Notes for the Chapter:

Song featured in the chapter is 'Had a Dad' by Jane's Addiction, and chapter title is a Cranberries song, as I've been listening to them all day. Hope you enjoy

the chapter. We're nearing the end now! =]

19. Drive

Notes for the Chapter:

So, here it is, the final chapter. Thank you so much for everyone's lovely comments and kudos, it's been really fun writing this fic, and I think it's actually the longest thing I've ever written. I intend to add a complete playlist of all the songs featured in this fic at some point, so watch this space!

October 25th, 1992

Steve waited, hands still tight on the wheel as he stared out at the gates of Hawkins Penitentiary. Max had offered to accompany him just before her return to Cali. As had Nancy and Jon. But he'd dismissed every offer. No, today was reserved just for himself and Billy. They'd been through too much together, and *only* together, to saturate it. The past few years Steve had spent apart from Billy had been the most painful of his entire life, and even though they'd been separated for the majority of it, it hadn't changed anything with regards to Steve's feelings for Billy. They'd reunited almost immediately following Neil's trial.

Finally, Steve managed to step out of his car. It was a typical October afternoon, the air was crisp, a chill wind breezing over him as he leaned against the bonnet of his beat-down Beamer, his heart pounding in his chest at the thought that, in just a few short minutes, he would be able to hold the only man he'd ever loved in his arms for the first time in years.

After Billy's testimony at the trial, he'd managed to not only incarcerate the man for a life sentence but reduce his own sentence to time-served with parole. And now that time was up.

Following Billy's new sentence, Steve had been visiting every week. By August, they were a couple once again. But the frustration of not so much as being able to hold Billy's hand had been driving Steve crazy. Max had been back and forth between her diner in California and his house, visiting when she could. And Nancy and Jon had

driven down as much as possible too. But Nancy was eight months pregnant by this point, and the visits had been tapering off since the start of September.

Steve was going to be the godfather. And Billy ‘*an honorary Godfather*’. Steve could only imagine what Nancy’s parents thought of that. And it made him laugh, the idea of Mr and Mrs Wheeler gritting their teeth and smiling as they were delivered such news.

Your ex-boyfriend and his ex-con...partner. Nancy, darling, are you sure?

Nancy’s words, she’d smiled on her last visit as she’d told them, impersonating her mother’s high pitched exclamation. The grin spread across Billy’s face had been priceless, and it had been the first time Steve had really seen Billy smile in that way in the longest time.

Steve glanced at his watch. 3.15pm. Billy had been due for release quarter of an hour ago now. He tried to calm his mind, stave off the anxiety, the fear that this had all been some sort of sadistic dream, that any minute now he’d wake up and realise this had all been nothing more than a *maybe*. *Maybe* he’ll be released today. Or maybe not. After all, the prison system was known to hand out release approvals only to cruelly snatch them back at the last minute, Billy had told him as much.

And then there was the sudden clink of an iron gate.

Steve’s eyes snapped up from the ground, and his heart leapt in his chest as he saw the prison gates open, a line of prisoners in standard-issue release clothes being marched forward towards the parked cars of eagerly awaiting friends and relatives. Steve scanned through the crowds, desperately trying to pick out Billy, searching for that head of golden-bronze curls. But he couldn’t see him. The crowd of ex-cons began to diminish, one by one, until finally, Steve was left staring at an empty space between the open gates, two guards at either side.

His heart sank, and his blood ran cold.

No. No. This can’t be happening. This can’t be happening...

Steve felt the tears burning at his eyes, his throat tightening. His hands balled into shaking fists as he wrapped his arms around himself, feeling light-headed.

“You motherfuckers,” he whispered under his breath, then much louder, “you goddamn lying *motherfuckers!*”

“They really were a set of motherfuckers, Harrington, you’re right...”

Steve jolted upright then, turning in the direction of the familiar voice.

“Shit, Billy?!” he stared back at his boyfriend, who stood just several feet away from him now, dressed in a hideous standard issue release outfit comprised of too-big bootcut jeans and an oversized khaki sweatshirt. He was grinning, his blue eyes and golden locks appearing so much more...*alive*...in this natural light. It was the first time Steve had seen Billy in natural daylight since his arrest, and the image was almost surreal. “I...I can’t believe it’s you...”

“Why not?” Billy smirked. “Told you I was getting out today, didn’t I?”

“But the...the gates just opened...and they...they said...”

“Yeah, bet they told you I was getting out at three, right? Typical, useless assholes. Here, take some of these from me already, will you?”

Steve’s mouth was still hanging slightly agape as Billy thrust a handful of confectionary and what looked like some sort of neon coloured slushie into his hands.

“Wh...where did you get...”

“To the store,” Billy shrugged. “They let me out at two. I told them you wouldn’t be here until three and they told me that wasn’t their fuckin’ problem. But they gave me all my crap back from when I was first hauled in there. I had five dollars in my back pocket that night, who knew? Anyway, I thought I’d go get us some snacks from the store over there, it was Sour Patch Dicks or whatever that you liked wasn’t it? Oh and I got one of those....”

But Steve had already dropped the arsenal of sugar to the floor, his lips pressing against Billy's so hard it hurt, all teeth on lips, sloppy, uncoordinated, hands running through the tangles of curls, taking in that familiar scent and taste that was so distinctively *Billy*. And it was a sensation he'd pined for for so many years that he never wanted it to stop.

"Easy, Harrington," Billy laughed, finally pulling away. "Save some of that for later, huh? We're not on the clock anymore." He reached out to touch the side of Steve's face, brushing his thumb against Steve's cheek to wipe away a rogue tear that had managed to escape in the moment. "Thanks to you, we've got each other forever now."

Steve laughed, and perhaps he'd have felt embarrassed at just how tearful and sloppy he felt right now, if it weren't for the fact he was finally face to face with the love of his fucking life, outside of that awful cage that had kept them at arm's length for so long.

There was another screech of iron gates, followed by a heavy clatter of chains as the prison gates were locked back up, and the two briefly stripped their gaze away from one another to look on at the building.

And Steve could have sworn, for the briefest moment, he noticed Billy flinch.

"C'mon," Billy turned back to Steve, that trademark, mischievous light returning to his face. "I've spent more than enough time staring at the gates of that shithole. Let's go."

"Where you wanna go, Bill?" Steve found himself looking down all of a sudden, pulling his sneakers away from a sticky stream of neon blue ice water now pooling around his feet.

"Well for starters, Princess, you can take me to Arcade and get me another slushie."

It was difficult for Steve to remember much of what had happened for the rest of that day. They'd gone to the Arcade, Billy had got his slushie, screamed his head off at multiple arcade games when he'd

lost on them, screamed his head off when he won on one a toy panda on a Grabbing Claw machine, and generally ran around the place as if he'd been trying to make up for years of lost youth.

By the time they'd got back to the house, Billy had just about managed to shut up about the fucking panda, now resting triumphantly on the Beamer's dashboard. Steve wasn't really sure what was going through Billy's mind, if anything, other than a manic, childlike energy. And he wasn't so sure what had been going on in his own head either. The whole day seemed like some sort of lucid dream, as if it wasn't really happening at all.

The night had been the same, Steve's grand plans for some elaborate meal he was going to cook for the two of them thrown out within minutes of him closing the front door behind them. He'd just about managed to turn the lights on before they were unceremoniously flicked off again, and Billy was pushing him up against the wall, unable to keep his hands off him.

The fact that he had him back only became real deep into the early hours of the next morning, as he lay there in the still darkness, head against Billy's chest, listening to him sleep, watching the rise and fall of his chest, trying to make out his features in the darkness. His glance briefly turned to the scar on Billy's forearm, the nasty etching he'd only caught the briefest glimpse of upon one of his last visits to the prison. And that's when he realised it'd been altered. What had previously been a large capital S with a jagged, unfinished line next to it had been 'completed' (if that word was even appropriate) into a set of initials. S.H. *Fuck*. This really wasn't a dream. He had Billy back, *finally, he had him back*. And there was something so perfectly isolated about this moment, so shut off from all the bullshit of the outside world that he never wanted it to end, never wanted to let go. He leaned up to kiss Billy's forehead.

"I love you, Billy."

Billy stirred in his sleep, rolled over and abruptly lay his arm flat out against Steve's face.

"Shhhut up, sleeping..." he mumbled in his daze. And then, after a pause, "Love you too."

October 31st, 1992

“Barbara Tonya Byers, they’re calling her,” Steve said, opening the patio doors and joining Billy on the chair swing outside.

“Shit, I bet Nancy and Jon regret coming across so much tragedy now, huh?” Billy snorted, stubbing his cigarette out.

“Don’t be an asshole, Billy, I think it’s sweet they’re calling their kid that,” Steve nudged him in the side gently.

“So you *like* the name, huh?” Billy raised his eyebrows incredulously as if daring him to answer.

“I think it’s sweet....”

“Little Barbie Byers. BTB...”

“Stop it!” Steve was laughing now, they both were.

“Shit, you know my mom hated her first name, don’t you?” Billy sighed. “Thought it sounded like a misspelling of Tanya or something...”

“Well, keep that to your fucking self, will you? The poor kid’s gonna be here in a couple weeks and they’ve already got their hearts set on it.”

The patio doors slid open, and the sounds of chatter and music leaked through onto the patio.

“Guys, you planning on sneaking off without saying goodbye or something?” Jon asked, voice a little slurrer than it had been since they’d last spoken to him that night.

“Be right in, Jon,” Steve called, as they followed him inside.

Nancy was stood, cross-armed at the entrance to the kitchen, watching as Jon leaned over the stereo and turned up the music to an irritatingly loud volume.

“You might want to turn that up a bit more, Jon, I don’t think the next town can hear it!” Nancy snapped over the music.

“Yeah it’s a good song, Nance, it’s a fucking.... *awesome* song! The Clash, man...the fucking Clash...”

“We’re going to clash in a minute, Jon, I swear to god!”

The party had been Nancy’s idea, a sort of combined Halloween party and late Baby Shower. With Nancy not drinking for obvious reasons, and Steve and Billy staying sober and ready to hit the road straight after the party, it seemed Jon had taken it upon himself to drink for all three of them.

Nancy turned her attention away from Jon as she saw Billy and Steve.

“I’m sorry,” she laughed. “Ignore him. I guess he’s just uh...taking the news of your departure very hard....or something...”

“*Darling, you’ve got to let me knooooowww...*” Jonathan wailed along to the lyrics of the too-loud song.

“Nah. He’s embracing his last few weeks of freedom before it’s throw up and diaper city...” Billy muttered, before yelping at another, sharper nudge to the side from Steve.

“So, I guess this is goodbye for now,” Nancy sighed, turning her attention back to Billy and Steve. She was smiling, but there was a sadness in her eyes as she pulled them both in for a hug. “I’m so happy for the both of you, I really am. And you’re gonna come visit as soon as this little one is born, you understand?” she pulled away, resting her hand on her baby bump. “Little Barb is gonna want to meet her godfathers.”

Steve shot Billy a sideways glance, and Billy was thankfully able to stifle what was obviously a particularly challenging onset of laughter.

“Of course we will, Nance.”

“And bring Maxine too,” Nancy pointed a warning finger at the both of them. “You *all* need to come visit regularly, you hear? I don’t want

you all spending too much time in Cali and turning into desert trash.”

“Hey, listen, Nance, I’m *proud* desert trash...” Billy began, before finding himself pushed into a sloppy four-way hug courtesy of Jonathan.

Goodbyes out of the way, and Billy and Steve were sat in their new blue Camaro, waving back at Nancy and Jon. Their front door finally closed, and Billy hit the ignition, feeling a pleasant tingle run down his spine at that long-forgotten, distinctive roar of the Camaro’s engine, the feel of his hands against the wheel.

The sun was setting now, a beautiful, orangey-pink hue, and the smell of approaching dusk lingered in the cool air.

The radio flipped on, and they set off.

*‘Who’s gonna pick you up, when you fall
Who’s gonna hang it up, when you call...’*

“You sure you’re ready to leave all this behind, Harrington?” Billy asked.

“Billy, I’ve never been surer of anything in my whole life.”

*‘Who’s gonna hold you down, when you shake
Who’s gonna come around, when you break...’*

“Steve?”

“Yeah, Bill?”

“I hate this fuckin’ song....”

‘Who’s gonna drive you home tonight...’

Notes for the Chapter:

Songs in this chapter are Should I Stay or Should I Go by The Clash and Drive by the Cars.

Thankyou so much for reading and I would love to

hear anyone's over all feedback! <3 <3 <3 = D

Come chat to me on tumblr @billys-camaro if you wish! :)